PDC 58370-9

THE MAGAZINE

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

ISAAC ASIMOV
The Planet That Wasn't

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Croatoan
by HARLAN ELLISON

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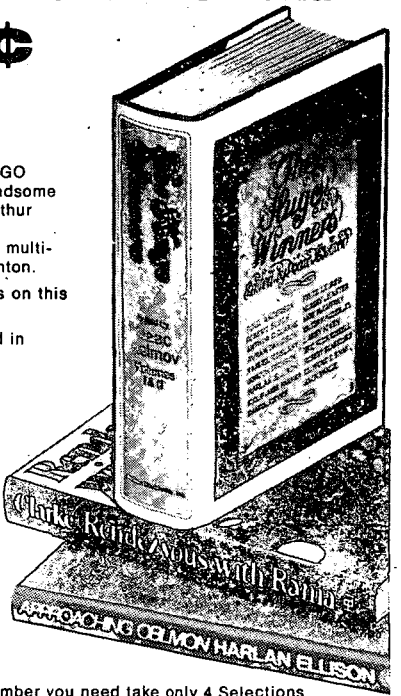

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Hank Davis, ASSISTANT EDITOR — Dale Beardale, CIRCULATION MANAGER

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 48; No. 4, Whole No. 288, May 1975. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.00 per copy. Annual subscription $10.00; $11.00 in Canada and Mexico, $12.00 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Editorial submissions should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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JOSEPH W. FERMAN, 1906-1974

Joseph W. Ferman, publisher of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* from 1955 to 1970, died December 29, 1974 at the age of 68. He was many things to me: my father and close friend, mentor and business partner. He had more to do with the success of this magazine than anyone.

Joe Ferman began his long career in publishing when he became a bookkeeper at Alfred A. Knopf after his graduation from New York City's High School of Commerce. He attended college at night and graduated from New York University in 1927.

It was shortly after he joined Knopf that the following announcement went out to the press: "Mr. Alfred A. Knopf announces that he is preparing to establish a new American monthly review. The first issue will probably be ready January first. It will be called *The American Mercury* and its editors will be Mr. George Jean Nathan and Mr. H. L. Mencken..." The *Mercury* quickly became the most important political journal of the 20s and 30s, and Joe Ferman was named its circulation manager, where he made a considerable contribution to its growth.

He then became Vice President and General Manager of Mercury Publications, which, under Lawrence Spivak (later founder of "Meet the Press") had acquired *The American Mercury* from Knopf and which was publishing several other magazines, including *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

In 1946, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas came to Mercury Publications with the idea of publishing a new fantasy magazine. Three years later, in the Fall of 1949, the first issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* appeared on the newsstands. In 1955, Joe Ferman acquired Mercury Publications from Spivak and thus became publisher of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* — or, EQMM and F&SF, as mystery and sf fans know them.

His interests and concerns went far beyond his career (he was an avid bridge and tennis player, a founder and member of several civil rights organizations), but I want to remember him here as a guiding force behind three exceptional magazines, particularly F&SF, with which he had the longest and most intimate association. He was a voracious reader and loved the printed word, and yet he was primarily a publisher, a businessman who cared deeply about the quality of his product. His publications, while influential and respected, were by their very nature destined to have some rough going in the commercial marketplace. It was Joe Ferman's ability and patience and hard work that kept these quality magazines healthy in a field not noted for easy sledding.

Further, he was a businessman who respected his magazines' readers, writers and editors, and who had their respect and friendship, from Mencken and Nathan to Lee and Dannay ("Ellery Queen") to Boucher and McComas and Robert Mills and Avram Davidson and Isaac Asimov of F&SF.

And finally, he was, with all his accomplishments, a modest man, a gentleman, and a gentle man. I miss him very much, in many different ways.

—Edward L. Ferman

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From the author — whose F&SF novelet "The Deathbird" won last year's Hugo award — a few words about this brand new story: "I gave an assignment to my Clarion writers to do a story about a land where all lost things to; decided to do a story, too, so they wouldn't feel I'd ask them to attempt something I wouldn't; at lunch, one of the students mumbled something about alligators in the New York subways: it sparked me to the story idea. Subsequently, I had a terrible personal experience that forms the core of the story. For those who obstinately insist on identifying the author with the viewpoint character, I stress in the most pugnacious terms I am *not* Gabe, despite my acquaintance with spelunking and the wonders of the Manhattan sewer system."

Croatoan

by HARLAN ELLISON

Beneath the city, there is yet another city; wet and dark and strange; a city of sewers and moist scuttling creatures and running rivers so desperate to be free not even Styx fits them. And in that lost city beneath the city, I found the child.

Oh my God, if I knew where to start. With the child? No, before that. With the alligators? No, earlier. With Carol? Probably. It always started with a Carol. Or an Andrea. A Stephanie. Always someone. There is nothing cowardly about suicide; it takes determination.

"Stop it! Goddammit, just *stop* it ... I said stop ..." And I had to hit her. It wasn't that hard a crack, but she had been weaving, moving, stumbling: she went over the coffee table, all the fifty dollar gift books coming down on top of her. Wedged between the sofa and the overturned table. I kicked the table out of the way and bent to help her up, but she grabbed me by the waist and pulled me down; crying, begging me to *do* something. I held her and put my face in her hair and tried to say something right, but what could I say?

Denise and Joanna had left, taking the d&c tools with them. She had been quiet, almost as though stunned by the hammer, after they had scraped her. Quiet, stunned, dry-eyed but hollow-eyed; watching me with the plastic Baggie. The sound of the toilet

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flushing had brought her running from the kitchen, where she had lain on a mattress pad. I heard her coming, screaming, and caught her just as she started through the hall to the bathroom. And hit her, without wanting to, just trying to stop her as the water sucked the Baggie down and away.

"D-*do* somethi-ing," she gasped, fighting for air.

I kept saying Carol, Carol, over and over, holding her, rocking back and forth, staring over her head, across the living room to the kitchen, where the edge of the teak dining table showed through the doorway, the amber-stained mattress pad hanging half over the edge, pulled loose when Carol had come for the Baggie.

After a few minutes, she spiraled down into dry, sandpapered sighs. I lifted her onto the sofa, and she looked up at me.

"Go after him, Gabe. Please. Please, go after him."

"Come on, Carol, stop it. I feel lousy about it ..."

"*Go after him, you sonofabitch!*" she screamed. Veins stood out on her temples.

"I *can't* go after him, dammit, he's in the plumbing; he's in the fucking river by now! Stop it, get off my case, let me alone!" I was screaming back at her.

She found a place where untapped tears waited, and I sat there, across from the sofa, for almost half an hour, just the one lamp casting a dull glow across the living room, my hands clasped down between my knees, wishing she was dead, wishing I was dead, wishing everyone was dead ... except the kid. But. He was the only one who *was* dead. Flushed. Bagged and flushed. Dead.

When she looked up at me again, a shadow cutting off the lower part of her face so the words emerged from darkness, keynoted only by the eyes, she said, "Go find him." I had never heard anyone sound that way, ever. Not ever. It frightened me. Riptides beneath the surface of her words created trembling images of shadow women drinking Drano, lying with their heads inside gas ovens, floating face up in thick, red bath water, their hair rippling out like jellyfish.

I knew she would do it. I couldn't support that knowledge. "I'll try," I said.

She watched me from the sofa as I left the apartment, and standing against the wall in the elevator, I felt her eyes on me. When I reached the street, still and cold in the pre-dawn, I thought I would walk down to the River Drive and mark time till I could return and console her with the lie that I had tried but failed.

But she was standing in the

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window, staring down at me.

The manhole cover was almost directly across from me, there in the middle of the silent street.

I looked from the manhole cover to the window, and back again, and again, and again. She waited. Watching. I went to the iron cover and got down on one knee and tried to pry it up. Impossible. I bloodied my fingertips trying, and finally stood, thinking I had satisfied her. I took one step toward the building and realized she was no longer in the window. She stood silently at the curb, holding the long metal rod that wedged against the apartment door when the police lock was engaged.

I went to her and looked into her face. She knew what I was asking: I was asking, *isn't this enough? Haven't I done enough?*

She held out the rod. No, I hadn't done enough.

I took the heavy metal rod and levered up the manhole cover. It moved with difficulty, and I strained to pry it off the hole. When it fell, it made a clanging in the street that rose up among the apartment buildings with an alarming suddenness. I had to push it aside with both hands; and when I looked up from that circle of darkness that lay waiting, and turned to the spot where she had given me the tool, she was gone.

I looked up; she was back in the window.

The smell of the unwashed city drifted up from the manhole, chill and condemned. The tiny hairs in my nose tried to baffle it; I turned my head away.

I never wanted to be an attorney. I wanted to work on a cattle ranch. But there was family money, and the need to prove myself to shadows who had been dead and buried with their owners long since. People seldom do what they want to do; they usually do what they are *compelled* to do. Stop me before I kill again. There was no rational reason for my descending into that charnel house stink, that moist darkness. No rational reason, but Denise and Joanna from the Abortion Center had been friends of mine for eleven years. We had been in bed together many times; long past the time I had enjoyed being in bed together with them, or they had enjoyed being in bed together with me. They knew it. I knew it. They knew I knew, and they continued to set that as one of the payments for their attendance at my Carols, my Andreas, my Stephanies. It was their way of getting even. They liked me, despite themselves, but they had to get even. Get even for their various attendances over eleven years, the first of which had been one for the other, I don't

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remember which. Get even for many flushings of the toilet. There was no rational reason for going down into the sewers. None.

But there were eyes on me from an apartment window.

I crouched, dropped my legs over the lip of the open manhole, sat on the street for a moment, then slipped over the edge and began to climb down.

Slipping into an open grave. The smell of the earth is there, where there is no earth. The water is evil; vital fluid that has been endlessly violated. Everything is covered with a green scum that glows faintly in the darkness. An open grave waiting patiently for the corpse of the city to fall.

I stood on the ledge above the rushing tide, sensing the sodden weight of lost and discarded life that rode the waters toward even darker depths. *My God,* I thought, *I must be out of my mind just to* be *here.* It had finally overtaken me; the years of casual liaisons, careless lies, the guilt I suppose I'd *always* known would mount up till it could no longer be denied. And I was down here, where I belonged.

People do what they are compelled to do.

I started walking toward the arching passageway that led down and away from the steel ladder and the street opening above. Why not walk: aimless, can you perceive what I'm saying?

Once, years ago, I had an affair with my junior partner's wife. Jerry never knew about it. They're divorced now. I don't think he ever found out; she would have had to've been even crazier than I thought to tell him. Denise and Joanna had visited that time, too. I'm nothing if not potent. We flew to Kentucky together one weekend. I was preparing a brief, she met me at the terminal, we flew as husband and wife, family rate. When my work was done in Louisville, we drove out into the countryside. I minored in geology at college, before I went into law. Kentucky is rife with caves. We pulled in at a picnic grounds where some locals had advised us we could do a little spelunking, and with the minimal gear we had picked up at a sporting goods shop, we went into a fine network of chambers, descending beneath the hills and the picnic grounds. I loved the darkness, the even temperature, the smooth-surfaced rivers, the blind fish and water-insects that scurried across the wet mirror of the still pools. She had come because she was not permitted to have intercourse at the base of Father Duffy's statue on Times Square, in the main window of Bloomingdale's or on Channel 2 directly preceding The

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Late News. Caves were the next best thing.

For my part, the thrill of winding down deeper and deeper into the earth — even though graffiti and Dr. Pepper cans all along the way reminded me this was hardly unexplored territory — offset even her sophomoric appeals to "take her violently," there on the shell-strewn beach of a subterranean river.

I *liked* the feel of the entire Earth over me. I was not claustrophobic, I was — in some perverse way — wonderfully free. Even soaring! Under the ground, I was soaring!

The walk deeper into the sewer system did not unsettle or distress me. I rather enjoyed being alone. The smell was terrible, but terrible in a way I had not expected.

If I had expected vomit and garbage, this was certainly not what I smelled. Instead, there was a bittersweet scent of rot — reminiscent of Florida mangrove swamps. There was the smell of cinnamon, and wallpaper paste, and charred rubber; the warm odors of rodent blood and bog gas; melted cardboard, wool, coffee grounds still aromatic, rust.

The downward channel leveled out. The ledge became a wide, flat plain as the water went down through drainage conduits, leaving only a bubbling, frothy residue to sweep away into the darkness. It barely covered the heels of my shoes. Florsheims, but they could take it. I kept moving. Then I saw the light ahead of me.

It was dim, flickering, vanished for a moment as something obscured it from my view, moving in front of it, back again, dim and orange. I moved toward the light.

It was a commune of bindlestiffs; derelicts gathered together beneath the streets for safety and the skeleton of camaraderie. Five very old men in heavy overcoats and three even older men in castoff Army jackets ... but the older men were younger, they only *looked* older: a condition of the skids. They sat around a waste-barrel oil drum filled with fire. Dim, soft, withered fire that leaped and curled and threw off sparks all in slow motion. Dreamwalking fire; somnambulist fire; mesmerized fire. I saw an atrophied arm of flame like a creeper of kangaroo ivy emerge over the lip of the barrel, struggling toward the shadowed arch of the tunnel ceiling; it stretched itself thin, released a single, teardrop-shaped spark, and then fell back into the barrel without a scream.

The hunkering men watched me come toward them. One of them said something, directly into the ear of the man beside him; he moved his lips very little and never

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took his eyes off me. As I neared, the men stirred expectantly. One of them reached into a deep pocket of his overcoat for something bulky. I stopped and looked at them.

They looked at the heavy iron rod Carol had given me.

They wanted what I had, if they could get it.

I wasn't afraid. I was under the Earth and I was part iron rod. They could not get what I had. They knew it. That's why there are always less killings than there might be. People *always* know.

I crossed to the other side of the channel, close to the wall. Watching them carefully. One of them, perhaps strong himself, perhaps merely stupider, stood up and, thrusting his hands deeper into his overcoat pockets, paralleled my passage down the channel away from them.

The channel continued to descend slightly, and we walked away from the oil drum and the light from the fire and the tired community of subterranean cast-offs. I wondered idly when he would make his move, but I wasn't worried. He watched me, trying to see me more clearly, it seemed, as we descended deeper into the darkness. He moved up closer, but didn't cross the channel. I turned the bend first.

Waiting, I heard the sounds of rats in their nests.

He didn't come around the bend.

I found myself beside a service niche in the tunnel wall, and stepped back into it. He came around the bend, on my side of the channel. I could have stepped out as he passed my hiding place, could have clubbed him to death with the iron rod before he realized that the stalker had become the stalked.

I did nothing, stayed far back motionless in the niche and let him pass. Standing there, my back to the slimy wall, listening to the darkness around me, utter, final, even palpable. But for the tiny twittering sounds of rats I could have been two miles down in the central chamber of some lost cavern maze.

There's no logic to why it happened. At first, Carol had been just another casual liaison, another bright mind to touch, another witty personality to enjoy, another fine and workable body to work so fine with mine. I grow bored quickly. It's not a sense of humor I seek — lord knows every slithering, hopping, crawling member of the animal kingdom has a sense of humor — for christ sake even dogs and *cats* have a sense of humor — it's wit! Wit is the answer. Let me touch a woman with wit and I'm gone, sold on the spot. I said to her, the first time I met her, at a

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support luncheon for the Liberal candidate for D.A., "Do you fool around?"

"I don't fool," she said, instantly, no time-lapse, no need for rehearsal, fresh out of her mind, "fools bore me. Are you a fool?"

I was delighted and floored at the same time. I went fumfuh-fumfuh, and she didn't give me a moment. "A simple yes or no will suffice. Answer this one: how many sides are there to a round building?"

I started to laugh. She watched me with amusement, and for the first time in my life I actually saw someone's eyes twinkle with mischief. "I don't know," I said, "how many sides *are* there to a round building?"

"Two," she answered, "*in*side and *out*side. I guess you're a fool. No, you may not take me to bed." And she walked away.

I was undone. She couldn't have run it better if she had come back two minutes in a time machine, knowing what I'd say, and programmed me into it. And so I chased her. Up hill and down dale, all around that damned dreary luncheon, till I finally herded her into a corner — which was precisely what she'd been going for.

"As Bogart said to Mary Astor, 'You're good, thweetheart, very, very good.'" I said it fast, for fear she'd start running me around again. She settled against the wall, a martini in her hand, and she looked up at me with that twinkling.

At first it was just casual. But she had depth, she had wiliness, she had such an air of self-possession that it was inevitable I would start phasing-out the other women, would start according her the attention she needed and wanted and without demanding ... demanded.

I came to care.

Why didn't I take precautions? Again, there's no logic to it. I thought she was; and for a while, she was. Then she stopped. She told me she had stopped, something internal, the gynecologist had suggested she go off the pill for a while. She suggested vasectomy to me. I chose to ignore the suggestion. But chose not to stop sleeping with her.

When I called Denise and Joanna, and told them Carol was pregnant, they sighed, and I could see them shaking their heads sadly. They said they considered me a public menace, but told me to tell her to come down to the Abortion Center and they would put the suction pump to work. I told them, hesitantly, that it had gone too long, suction wouldn't work. Joanna simply snarled,

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"You thoughtless cocksucker!" and hung up the extension. Denise read me the riot act for twenty minutes. She didn't suggest a vasectomy; she suggested, in graphic detail, how I might have my organ removed by a taxidermist using a cheese grater. Without benefit of anesthesia.

But, they came, with their dilation and curettage implements, and they laid her out on the teak table with a mattress under her, and then they had gone — Joanna pausing a moment at the door to advise me this was the last time, the very last time, the last time she could stomach it, that it was the last time and did I have that fixed firmly, solidly, embedded in the forefront of my brain?

And now I was here in the sewers.

I tried to remember what Carol looked like, but it wasn't an image I could fix in my mind half as solidly as I had fixed the thought that this. Was. The. Last. Time.

I stepped out of the service niche.

The young-old bindlestiff who had followed me was standing there, silently waiting. At first I couldn't even see him — there was only the vaguest lighter shade of darkness to my left, coming from around the bend and that oil drum full of fire — but I knew he was there. Even as *he* had known I was there, all the time. He didn't speak, and I didn't speak, and after a while I was able to discern his shape. Hands still deep in his pockets.

"Something?" I said, more than a little belligerently.

He didn't answer.

"Get out of my way."

He stared at me, sorrowfully, I thought, but that had to be nonsense. I thought.

"Don't make me have to hurt you," I said.

He stepped aside, still watching me.

I started to move past him, down the channel.

He didn't follow, but I was walking backward to keep him in sight, and he didn't take his eyes off mine.

I stopped. "What do you want?" I asked. "Do you need some money?"

He came toward me. Inexplicably, I wasn't afraid he would try something. He wanted to see me more clearly, closer. I thought.

"You couldn't give me nothing I need." His voice was rusted, pitted, scarred, unused, unwieldly.

"Then why are you following me?"

"Why've you come down here?"

I didn't know what to say.

"You make it bad down here, Mister. Why don't you g'wan and

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go back upside, leave us alone?"

"I have a right to be here." Why had I said *that?*

"You got no right to come down here; stay back upside where you belong. All of us know you make it bad, Mister."

He didn't want to hurt me, he just didn't want me here. Not even right for these outcasts, the lowest level to which men could sink; even here I was beneath contempt. His hands were deep in his pockets. "Take your hands out of your pockets, slowly, I want to make sure you aren't going to hit me with something when I turn around. Because I'm going on down there, not back. Come on now, do it. Slowly. Carefully."

He took his hands out of his pockets slowly and held them up. He had no hands. Chewed stumps, glowing faintly green like the walls where I had descended from the manhole.

I turned and went away from him.

It grew warmer, and the phosphorescent green slime on the walls gave some light. I had descended as the channel had fallen away deeper under the city. This was a land not even the noble streetworkers knew, a land blasted by silence and emptiness. Stone above and below and around, it carried the river without a name into the depths, and if I could not return, I would stay here like the skids. Yet I continued walking. Sometimes I cried, but I don't know why, or for what, or for whom. Certainly not for myself.

Was there ever a man who had everything more than I had had everything? Bright words, and quick movements, soft cloth next to my skin, and places to place my love, if I had only recognized that it *was* love.

I heard a nest of rats squealing as something attacked them, and I was drawn to a side tunnel where the shining green effluvium made everything bright and dark as the view inside the machines they used to have in shoe stores. I hadn't thought of that in years. Until they found out that the X-rays could damage the feet of children, shoe stores used bulky machines one stepped up onto and into which one inserted newly shod feet. And when the button was pushed, a green X-ray light came on, showing the bones that lay beneath the flesh. Green and black. The light was green, and the bones were duty black. I hadn't thought of that in years, but the side tunnel was illuminated in just that way.

An alligator was ripping the throats of baby rats.

It had invaded the nest and was feeding mercilessly, tossing the bodies of the ripped and shredded

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rodents aside as it went for the defenseless smaller ones. I stood watching, sickened, but fascinated. Then, when the shrieks of anguish were extinguished at last, the great saurian, direct lineal descendant of Rex, snapped them up one by one and, thrashing its tail, turned to stare at me.

He had no hands. Chewed stumps, glowing faintly green like the walls.

I moved back against the wall of the side tunnel as the alligator belly-crawled past me, dragging its leash. The thick, armored tail brushed my ankle and I stiffened.

Its eyes glowed red as those of an Inquisition torturer.

I watched its scaled and taloned feet leave deep prints in the muck underfoot, and I followed the beast, its trail clearly marked by the impression of the leash in the mud.

Frances had a five-year-old daughter. She took the little girl for a vacation to Miami Beach one year. I flew down for a few days. We went to a Seminole village, where the old women did their sewing on Singer machines. I thought that was sad. A lost heritage, perhaps; I don't know. The daughter, whose name I can't recall, wanted a baby alligator. Cute. We brought it back on the plane in a cardboard box with air holes. Less than a month later it had grown large enough to snap. Its teeth weren't that long, but it snapped. It was saying: this is what I'll be; direct lineal descendant of Rex. Frances flushed it down the toilet one night after we'd made love. The little girl was asleep in the next room. The next morning, Frances told her the alligator had run off.

The sewers of the city are infested with full-grown alligators. No amount of precaution and no forays by hunting teams with rifles or crossbows or flame throwers have been able to clear the tunnels. The sewers are still infested; workers go carefully. So did I.

The alligator moved steadily, graceful in its slithering passage down one tunnel and into another side passage and down always down, steadily into the depths. I followed the trail of the leash.

We came to a pool, and it slid into the water like oil, its dead-log snout above the fetid foulness, its Torquemada eyes looking toward its destination.

I thrust the iron rod down my pant leg, pulled my belt tight enough to hold it, and waded into the water. It came up to my neck, and I lay out and began dog-paddling, using the one leg that would bend. The light was very green and sharp now.

The saurian came out on the

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muck beach at the other side and crawled forward toward an opening in the tunnel wall. I crawled out, pulled the iron rod loose, and followed. The opening gave into darkness, but as I passed through, I trailed my hand across the wall and felt a door. I stopped, surprised, and felt in the darkness. An iron door, with an arched closure at the top and a latch. Studs, heavy and round and smelling faintly of rust, dotted the door.

I walked through ... and stopped.

There had been something else on the door. I stepped back and ran my fingers over the open door again. I found the indentations at once and ran my fingertips across them, trying to discern in the utter darkness what they were. Something about them ... I traced them carefully.

They were letters. C. My fingers followed the curves. R. Cut into the iron somehow. O. What was a door doing down here? A. The cuts seemed very old, weathered, scummy. T. They were large, and very regular. O. They made no sense, no word formed that I knew. A. And I came to the end of the sequence. N.

CROATOAN. It made no sense. I stayed there a moment, trying to decide if it was a word the sanitation engineers might have used for some designation of a storage area, perhaps. Croatoan. No sense. Not Croatian, it was Croatoan. Something nibbled at the back of my memory: I *had* heard the word before, knew it from somewhere, long ago, a vapor of sound traveling back on the wind of the past. It escaped me, I had no idea what it meant.

I went through the doorway again.

Now I could not even see the trail of the leash the alligator had dragged. I kept moving, the iron rod in my hand.

I heard them coming toward me from both sides, and it was clearly alligators, many of them. From side passages. I stopped and reached out to find the wall of the channel. I couldn't find it. I turned around, hoping to get back to the door, but when I hurried back the way I thought I had come, I didn't reach the door. I just kept going. Either I had gone down a fork and not realized the channel had separated, or I had lost my sense of direction. And the slithering sounds kept coming.

Now, for the first time, I felt terror! The safe, warm, enfolding darkness of the underworld had, in an instant, merely by the addition of sounds around me, become a suffocating winding-sheet. It was as if I'd abruptly awakened in a coffin, buried six feet beneath the

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tightly stomped loam; that clogging terror Poe had always described so well, because he had feared it himself ... the premature burial. Caves no longer seemed comfortable.

I began to run!

I lost the rod somewhere, the iron bar that had been my weapon, my security.

I fell and slid face-first in the muck.

I scrabbled to my knees and kept going. No walls, no light, no slightest aperture or outcropping, nothing to give me a sense of being in the world, running through a limbo without beginning, without end.

Finally, exhausted, I slipped and fell and lay for a moment. I heard slithering all around me and managed to pull myself to a sitting position. My back grazed a wall, and I fell up against it with a moan of gratitude. Something, at least; a wall against which to die.

I don't know how long I lay there, waiting for the teeth.

Then I felt something touching my hand. I recoiled with a shriek. It had been cool and dry and soft. Did I recall that snakes and other amphibians were cool and dry? Did I remember that? I was trembling.

Then I saw light. Flickering, bobbing, going up and down just slightly, coming toward me.

And as the light grew closer and brighter, I saw there was something right beside me; the something that had touched me; it had been there for a time, watching me.

It was a child.

Naked, deathly white, with eyes great and luminous, but covered with a transparent film as milky as a membrane, small, very young, hairless, its arms shorter than they should have been, purple and crimson veins crossing its bald skull like traceries of blood on a parchment, fine even features, nostrils dilating as it breathed shallowly, ears slightly tipped as though reminiscent of an elf, barefooted but with pads on the soles, this child stared at me, looked up at me, its little tongue visible as it opened its mouth filled with tiny teeth, trying to form sounds, saying nothing, watching me, a wonder in its world, watching me with the saucer eyes of a lemur, the light behind the membrane flickering and pulsing. This child.

And the light came nearer, and the light was many lights. Torches, held aloft by the children who rode the alligators.

Beneath the city, there is yet another city; wet and dark and strange.

At the entrance to their land

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someone — not the children, they couldn't have done it — long ago built a road sign. It is a rotted log on which has been placed, carved from fine cherrywood, a book and a hand. The book is open, and the hand rests on the book, one finger touching the single word carved in the open pages. The word is CROATOAN.

On August 13, 1590, Governor John White of the Virginia colony managed to get back to the stranded settlers of the Roanoke, North Carolina, colony. They had been waiting three years for supplies, but politics, foul weather and the Spanish Armada had made it impossible. As they went ashore, they saw a pillar of smoke. When they reached the site of the colony, though they found the stronghold walls still standing against possible Indian attacks, no sign of life greeted them. The Roanoke colony had vanished. Every man, woman and child, gone. Only the word CROATOAN had been left. *"One of the chiefe trees or postes at the right side of the entrance had the barke taken off, and 5. foote from the ground in fayre Capital letters was grauen CROATOAN without any crosse or signe of distresse."*

There was a Croatan island, but they were not there. There was a tribe of Hatteras Indians who were called Croatans, but they knew nothing of the whereabouts of the lost colony. All that remains of legend is the story of the child Virginia Dare and the mystery of what happened to the lost settlers of Roanoke.

Down here in this land beneath the city, live the children. They live easily and in strange ways. I am only now coming to know the incredible manner of their existence. How they eat, what they eat, how they manage to survive, and have managed for hundreds of years, these are all things I learn day by day, with wonder surmounting wonder.

I am the only adult here.

They have been waiting for me.

They call me father.

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Poul Anderson's scientific background is perhaps not so well known as his propensity for barbarians; actually, he is as much at home with a slide-rule as a broadsword. I am strick with awe when running across such items here as:

ANUBELEA B (BEL)

Type: G2, main sequence
Mass: 0.95 Sol
Mean diameter: 1.06 Sol
Mean rotation period: 0.91 Sol
*Luminoisity: 0.98 Sol**
Effective temperature: 5800°K.

As well as a Table of "*PLANETS*/Elementary parameters (Earth = 1.0)", five of them, including:

	Mean orbital radius	Sidereal period	Mean equatorial diameter	Mass	Mean surface gravity
III (Ishtar)	1.03	1.072	1.14	1.53	1.18

And so on.

I am more at home with:

A horn blew in the hills above Tarhanna. Echoes toned off crags and scarps. Louder brawled the Esalia River, hastening through a canyon towards the plain. Not yet had drought, already setting in elsewhere, shrunken it to the trickle, among stones that scorched the feet of the thirsty, which Aranak's grandfather had remembered from cubhood. But the air hung still and hot, with a smoky smell . . .

**Sol, Sol, Sol — and about Morris, he says nothing.*

AVRAM DAVIDSON

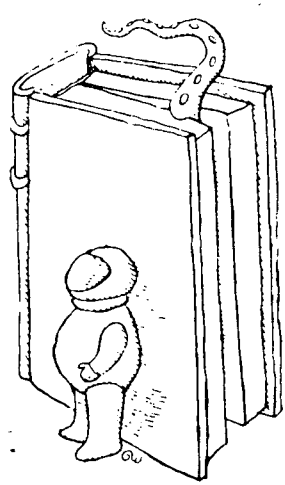
Books

Fire Time, Poul Anderson, Doubleday, $5.95.

Cosmic Laughter, Joe Haldeman, ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $5.95.

Infinite Jests, Robert Silverberg, ed., Chilton, $5.95.

The Centauri Device, M. John Harrison, Doubleday, $4.95.



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Popular literature, like nature, tends to take with one hand what it gives with the other. The handful of human characters (all caught in a 3-way plight, with humanity engaged at war elsewhere in the galaxy) in their colony on Ishtar-of-the-three-Suns are not so well-realized as are the centaur-like native Ishtarians — who have their own triangle of disaster: civilized against barbarian and both menaced by the encroaching third sun — who are very well-realized indeed; and the ending is perhaps too good to be true. On the other hand, the biology, the (?) centaurology, the ecology down to a *dot*, are beautifully worked out. Cover is by Gary Friedman and the upper part of it is very nice.

"A lot of science fiction is deadly serious," the amiable Joe Haldeman begins. ".... But if you listen closely, you'll hear an occasional chuckle, a belly-laugh, even, and over there — just four light-years south of Alpha Centaurus, a chorus of raucous laughter."

"A Slight Miscalculation," by Ben Bova, did not strike me as the sort of story generally appearing in *Analog*, which Dr. Bova now edits — and, in fact, it appeared *here*. The ending is a real guffaw — the only one which I got out of the book. Norman Spinrad's "It's A Bird! It's A Plane!" is an amusing spin-off from the comic book revival. A chuckle. "The Robots Are Here" is by Terry Carr, who, when good, is very, very good indeed; he is not at his best in this over-long tale of blundering robotic conspiracy. A smile. Haldeman the Compiler contributes his own "I of Newton," which commences with the happy notion that an abstruse math formula is also a spell for conjuring a demon; and then it goes downhill. A smile, but a saddened one. Alfred Bester's "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" is about a cuckold who zips furiously back and forth through time trying to expunge the sources of his shame: a faint purr.

Damon Knight's "To Serve Man" is the story which got *Galaxy* Magazine off to its flying start; crisp, succinct, ending with a shocker which is black humor at its best. "The Bomb in the Bathtub," by Thomas N. Scortia, has some mildly good stuff but is much too long. A tired smile. In "The Black Sorcerer of the Black Castle," andrew j. offutt undertakes a long spoof of Conan the Barbarian, and breaks a butterfly on a wheel. (Anyway, Ron Goulart did it years ago in this Magazine in two deft pages.) However, offutt has a spoof Glossary at the end which is *very* funny. For the Glossary, a chuckle. I should not

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have thought that Henry Kuttner could have written anything not of the top-most notch, but his "Gallegher Plus," while presenting the nice notion of "a machine ... apparently constructed only to eat dirt while singing 'St. James Infirmary' ...." I found otherwise uproariously dull. Oh, too bad, too bad. Excellent jacket design by Joey Cavanaugh.

"People who seldom read science fiction," Silverberg begins, "have an unhappy tendency to think of it as sober, joyless stuff—" Like Haldeman, he offers us The Other Side, which he calls "the visionary as comic." Off we go. — I somehow missed William Tenn's "Venus and the Seven Sexes" when first it appeared, though I kept hearing about it: first of its kind, maybe. A Hollywood cheapjack and lush manages to bumble into an already complicated mating game. Several smiles. And, it's *nice* to read the Old Damon Knight, here with an inimitable treatment of the now-familiar Earthman - trading - with - Aliens theme. Several smiles.

Joanna Russ's "Useful Phrases For the Tourist" is *sui generis*. The region being visited is The Locrine; phrases include: "That is my companion. It is not intended as a tip." "Waitress, this meal is still alive." "Although I am very flattered by your kind offer, I cannot accompany you to the mating pits, as I am viviparous." And more, more: Gasp, shudder, ho ho HO! Grahame Leman's "Conversational Mode" is between a patient / prisoner and his warden / physician / program; only way to sum it up is with William Tenn's "The laugh with a little bubble of blood at the end."

Brian W. Aldiss's "Heresies of the Huge God" is certainly different, but not enough. Rating is one sarcastic grunt. Robert Silverberg's "(NOW + n) (NOW-n)" is a version of the daydream of being able to know today what the stock market will do the day after tomorrow. A contented grunt. If. R. A. Lafferty ever wrote a dull story I never saw it; in "Slow Tuesday Night" people are able to accomplish in their peak hours the work of today's years ... also, to unaccomplish them. A wry, pleased, slow smile. "Help! I Am Dr. Morris Goldpepper" is Avram Davidson's story about the dentist who — Well, *I* liked it. And Philip K. Dick's "Oh, To Be A Blobel!" is the success story of "George Munster of catwalk 4, building WEF-395," and a Veteran of Unnatural Wars — it's by Philip K. *Dick*. Chuckles of incredulity. Alfred Bester's "Hobson's Choice" is also a treatment of time-travel daydreaming — Ah for the Past!

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and/or, Oh for the Future! A faint smile with a *big* bubble of blood, this one. In "I Plinglot, Who You?" Frederik Pohl supplies us with some rather sad smiles involving an inter-galactic trouble-maker, hoo boy. The jacket art is by Jáck Freas.

Mike John Harrison looks like a young Rasputin. If the young Rasputin could have written, maybe this is what he would have written like:

> Outside the gate, the androgynous whores of Golgotha crowded about him as he went, like subtly depraved children: all chemise and mutated orchids and their heads bobbing no higher than his waist, calling to him in soft, empty voices. Their minute hands plucked at his legs as he passed; some made offers of muted obscenity, others sang or raised their arms to be picked up, many simply clutched his hand and stared with ultimate cryptic promise.

And:

> A blue-gray waxy light drowned her pentacular command-bridge, running like tepid fire down the slippery perspectives of an extra-Galctic geometry, forming optical *verglas* on planes of alien metal-work, tracing the formal interlacing designs that covered the inner hull. Every four or five seconds, banks of stroboscopic lamps fired off, freezing and quantifying jagged areas of shadow, but defining no shape the eye could appreciate. Nothing was perpendicular or dependable.

Or:

> (The anarchists' space ships) hung in gay ambush, *Maupin, Trilby,* and *Les Fleurs du Mal;* the *Whistler,* the *Fastidious,* and the *Strange Great Sins.* In two long wings of twenty-four, they poised themselves "at the sharp apex of the present moment between two hypothetical eternities" — *Madame Bovary,* and the *Imaginary Portraits: Syringa* and *White Jonquil.* Centauri was nearer here, a bare actinic jewel of the port bow of *Atalanta in Calydon,* from which Hymation the conjurer led the second wing. Space enfolded them as they waited for their prey, they were embedded: a bracelet of gold in black volcanic glass — the *Forsaken Garden,* the *Let Us Go Hence,* and the *Melancholia that Transcends All Wit.*

Christ, this man writes brilliantly. I'm not sure what he might write like if he had a better theme than this one (James Bond out of Baudelaire) — blow all our minds out the window, maybe. Too many cardboard characters; decadence and violence and beautiful writing on horrible scenes. Nevertheless, *watch this man.* And shade your eyes. My word. (Jacket by Anita Siegel.)

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Part two of Robert Silverberg's compelling new novel about politics and prophecy in the year 2000. If you missed part one, the author's synopsis will bring you up to date (or, send us $1.00 and we'll rush you a copy of the April issue).

The Stochastic Man

by ROBERT SILVERBERG
(2nd of 3 parts)

Synopsis of Part I

Lew Nichols is nearly 35 years old as the twentieth century enters its final months. He has been, until recently, a key administrative assistant to Paul Quinn, the dynamic young mayor of New York City. He has been, until recently, the husband of Sundara Shastri, a strikingly beautiful woman of East Indian ancestry. He has been, until recently, a disciple of Martin Carvajal, an odd, parched little man who is capable of seeing the future. But now, as he looks back over the past few years during the closing days of the year 2000, Nichols finds himself alone; Quinn is his enemy, his marriage has come apart, Carvajal is dead.

Before becoming involved in politics Nichols had been in the business of stochastic prediction — essentially, high-powered guesswork. An innate knack for considering probabilities and extracting likely patterns had made him a successful short-range prophet, much consulted by businessmen and politicans. In 1995, his friend Haig Mardikian, a lawyer with political connections, had introduced Nichols to Paul Quinn, then an obscure state legislator but already seen by a few close friends as a potential Presidential candidate. Reluctantly at first, Nichols lets himself be drawn into the Quinn camp. With Nichols' almost infallible suggestions guiding campaign strategy, Quinn sweeps easily to victory in the 1997 election for Mayor of New York — first stop on his way to the White House. Nichols accepts an appointment on Mayor Quinn's staff.

The Presidency is still a distant dream, for the incumbent President Mortonson is unlikely to be defeated in the 2000 election and Nichols does not want his man prematurely exposed in a losing cause. The plan, therefore — proposed by Nichols and seconded by Quinn's other two main advisers, Deputy Mayor Haig Mardikian and City Finance Administrator Bob Lombroso — is to bring Quinn gradually into the center of national political life so that he can make a plausible try for the nomination in 2004. Drawing on all his stochastic skills, Nichols attempts to design a program of action that will catapult Quinn to power.

One day in March of 1999 Nichols

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meets a curious person at the office of Bob Lombroso. He is Martin Carvajal, a small, faded-looking man of about sixty, who has made millions speculating on Wall Street and was one of the most generous contributors to Quinn's campaign fund the year before. Carvajal too thinks Quinn is destined to become President, and wants to offer aid — not merely financial aid but suggestions of strategy. Nichols and Lombroso listen politely to him, for they have no wish to offend the millionaire, but Nichols in particular takes a patronizing attitude, regarding Carvajal as a well-meaning but ignorant political amateur seeking to meddle in things he does not understand. When he leaves Lombroso's office, Carvajal hands Nichols a cryptic memorandum bearing three predictions — none of them comprehensible to Nichols. He puts the memo away and dismisses Carvajal from his mind.

He is preoccupied, now, with designing the role Quinn is to play in the 2000 national election campaign; the idea is for him to make a game but unsuccessful bid for the vice-presidential nomination, thereby setting the stage for his Presidential bid four years later. Nichols is also troubled by events at home, for his wife Sundara has become affiliated with the Transit Creed, a new religion out of California that advocates irrational, unpredictable behavior, and the strains caused by Sundara's new way of life are pulling their marriage apart. Then, in May of 1999, State Controller Gilmartin is indicted in a bribery scandal — which startles Nichols, for one of Carvajal's three predictions had involved Gilmartin. Nichols investigates Carvajal's background, discovers that he has had an almost infallible record of success in the stock market, and — acting on a hunch — persuades Mayor Quinn to take a public stand on a measure controlling oil spills, something else Carvajal had suggested. Quinn has a tough oil-control law put through the City Council just a few days before several severe spills touch off a national outcry; Quinn benefits politically from the timing. Nichols now is convinced that Carvajal has some method for predicting the future that goes far beyond Nichols' own stochastic system of guesswork.

Then Carvajal's third prediction comes true: Governor Leydecker of California, the most powerful figure in the New Democratic Party, dies unexpectedly. Nichols is stunned and humbled by this unanswerable proof of Carvajal's gift.

He feels worthless and confused. He needs guidance.

He goes to Carvajal.

16.

This is a place where a millionaire gifted with second sight lives? A small grimy flat in a squat dilapidated ninety-year-old apartment house just off Flatbush Avenue in deepest Godforsaken Brooklyn? Going there was an experiment in foolhardiness. I knew — anybody in the municipal administration quickly gets to know — which areas of the city had been written off as out of bounds, beyond hope of redemption, outside the rule of law. This was one of them. Beneath the veil of time and decay I could see the

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bones of old residential respectability here; it had been a district of lower-middle-class Jews once, a neighborhood of kosher butchers and unsuccessful lawyers, and then lower-middle-class black, and then slum black, probably with Puerto enclaves, and now it was just a jungle, a corroding wasteland of crumbling little red-brick semidetached two-family houses and soot-filmed six-story apartment buildings, inhabited by drifters, sniffers, muggers, muggers, muggers of muggers, feral cat-packs, short-pants gangs, elephant rats, and Martin Carvajal. *"There?"* I blurted when, having suggested a meeting to Carvajal, he suggested we hold it at his home. I suppose it was tactless to be so astonished at where he lived. He replied mildly that no harm would come to me. "I think I'll arrange for a police escort anyway," I said, and he laughed and said that was the surest way to invite trouble, and he told me again, firmly, to have no fear, that I would be in no peril if I came alone.

The inner voice whose promptings I always obey told me to have faith, and so I went to Carvajal without a police escort, though not without fear.

No cab would go into that part of Brooklyn, and pod service, of course, does not reach places like that; I borrowed an unmarked car from the municipal pool and drove it myself, not having the gall to risk a chauffeur's life out there. But in time I came, undented if not undaunted, to Carvajal's street. Filth I had expected, yes, and rotting mounds of garbage in the street, and the rubble-strewn sites of demolished buildings looking like the gaps left by knocked-out teeth; but not the dry blackened corpses of beasts in the streets — dogs, goats, pigs? — and not the woody-stemmed weeds cracking through the pavement as if this were some ghost town, and not the reek of human dung and urine, and not the ankle-deep swirls of sand. A blast of oven heat hit me when I emerged, timidly and with misgivings, from the coolness of my car. Though this was only early June, a terrible late-August heat baked these miserable ruins.

I left the car set on full alarm. Myself, I was carrying a top-strength antipersonnel baton and wearing a hip-hugging security cone warranted to knock any malefactor a dozen meters. Still, I felt hideously exposed as I crossed the dreary pavement, knowing I had no defense against a casual sniper pot-shotting from above. But though a few sallow-faced inhabitants of this horrendous village eyed me sourly from the darkness behind their cracked and jagged windows, though a few

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lean-hipped street cowboys gave me long bleak glances, there were no fourth-floor fusillades. Later I learned I would never have lasted sixty seconds outside my automobile if Carvajal hadn't given orders insuring my safety. In this parched jungle he had immense authority; to his fierce neighbors he was a sort of warlock, a sacred totem, a holy fool, respected and feared and obeyed. His gift of vision, no doubt, used judiciously and with overwhelming impact, had made him invulnerable here — in the jungle no one trifles with a shaman — and today he had spread his mantle over me.

His apartment was on the fifth floor. There was no elevator. Each flight of stairs was a grim adventure. I heard the scurrying of giant rats; I choked and retched at foul unfamiliar odors; I imagined seven-year-old murderers lurking in every pool of shadow. Without incident I reached his door. He opened before I could find the bell. Even in this heat he wore a white shirt with buttoned collar, a gray tweed jacket, a brown necktie. He looked like a schoolmaster waiting to hear me recite my Latin conjugations and declensions. "You see?" he said. "Safe and sound. No harm."

Carvajal lived in three rooms: a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen. The ceilings were low, the plaster was cracking, the faded green walls looked as if they had last been painted in the days of Tricky Dick Nixon. The furniture was even older, with a Truman-era look to it, floppy and overstuffed, floral slipcovers and sturdy rhinoceros legs. The air was unconditioned and stifling; the illumination was incandescent and dim; the TV was an archaic table model; the kitchen sink had running water, not ultrasonics. When I was growing up in the mid-1970's, one of my closest friends was a boy whose father had died in Vietnam. He lived with his grandparents, and their place looked exactly like this one. Carvajal's apartment eerily recaptured the texture of mid-century America; it was like a movie set, or a period room at the Smithsonian.

With remote, absent-minded hospitality he settled me on the battered living room sofa and apologized for having neither drink nor drug to offer me. He was not an indulger, he explained, and very little was sold in this neighborhood. "It doesn't matter," I said grandly. "A glass of water will be fine."

The water was tepid and faintly rusty. I sat upright, spine rigid, legs tense. Carvajal, perching on the cushion of the armchair to my right, observed. "You look uncomfortable, Mr. Nichols."

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"I'll unwind in a minute or two. The trip out here —"

"Of course."

"But no one bothered me in the street. I have to confess I was expecting trouble, but —"

"I told you no harm would come."

"Still —"

"But I told you," he said mildly. "Didn't you believe me? You should have believed me, Mr. Nichols. You know that."

"I suppose you're right," I said, thinking, *Gilmartin, gellation, Leydecker.* Carvajal offered me more water. I smiled mechanically and shook my head. There was a sticky silence. After a moment I said, "This is a strange part of town for a person like you to choose."

"Strange? Why?"

"A man of your means could live anywhere in the city."

"I know."

"Why here, then?"

"I've always lived here," he said softly. "This is the only home I've ever known. These furnishings belonged to my mother, and some to *her* mother. I hear the echoes of familiar voices in these rooms, Mr. Nichols. I feel the living presence of the past. Is that so odd, to go on living where one has always lived?"

"But the neighborhood —"

"Has deteriorated, yes. Sixty years bring great changes. But the changes haven't been perceptible to me in any important way. A gentle decline, year by year, then perhaps a steeper decline, but I make allowances, I make adjustments, I grow accustomed to what is new and make it part of what has always been. And everything is so familiar to me, Mr. Nichols — the names written in the wet cement when the pavement was new long ago, the great ailanthus tree in the schoolyard, the weatherbeaten gargoyles over the doorway of the building across the street. Do you understand what I'm saying? Why should I leave these things for a sleek Staten Island condo?"

"The danger, for one."

"There's no danger. Not for me. These people regard me as the little man who's always been here, the symbol of stability, the one constant in a universe of entropic flow. I have a ritualistic value for them. I'm some sort of good-luck token, perhaps. At any rate no one who lives here has ever molested me. No one ever will."

"Can you be sure of that?"

"Yes," he said, with monolithic assurance, looking straight into my eyes, and I felt that chill again, that sense of standing on the rim of an abyss beyond my fathoming. There was another long silence. There was force flowing from him, a power altogether at odds with his drab appearance, his mild manner,

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his numb, burned-out expression. At length he said, "You wanted to ask me some questions, Mr. Nichols."

I nodded. Taking a deep breath, I plunged in. "You knew Leydecker was going to die this spring, didn't you? I mean, you didn't just guess he'd die. You knew."

"Yes." That same final, uncontestable *yes*.

"You knew that Gilmartin would get into trouble. You knew that oil tankers would spill ungelled oil."

"Yes. Yes."

"You know what the stock market is going to do tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and you've made millions of dollars by using that knowledge."

"That's also true."

"Therefore it's fair to say that you see future events with extraordinary clarity, with supernatural clarity, Mr. Carvajal."

"As do you."

"Wrong," I said. "I don't see future events at all. I've got no vision whatsoever of things to come. I'm merely very very good at guessing, at weighing probabilities and coming up with the most likely pattern, but I don't really *see*. I can't ever be certain that I'm right, just reasonably confident. Because all I'm doing is guessing. You *see*. You told me almost as much when we met in Bob Lombroso's office: I guess, you *see*. The future is like a movie playing inside your mind. Am I right?"

"You know you are, Mr. Nichols."

"Yes. I know I am. There can't be any doubt of it. I'm aware of what can be accomplished by stochastic methods, and the things you do go beyond the possibilities of guesswork. Maybe I could have predicted the likelihood of a couple of oil-tanker breakups, but not that Leydecker would drop dead or that Gilmartin would be exposed as a crook. I might have guessed that *some* key political figure would die this spring, but never which one. I might have guessed that *some* state politician would get busted, but not by name. Your predictions were exact and specific. That's not probabilistic forecasting. That's more like sorcery, Mr. Carvajal. By definition, the future is unknowable. But you seem to know a great deal about the future."

"About the immediate future, yes. Yes, I do, Mr. Nichols."

"Only the immediate future?"

He laughed. "Do you think my mind penetrates all of space and time?"

"I have no idea what your mind penetrates. I wish I knew. I wish I had some notion of how it works and what its limits are."

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"It works as you described it," Carvajal replied. "When I want to, I *see*. A vision of things to come plays within me like a film." He sounded almost bored. "Is that the only thing you came here to find out?"

"Don't you know? Surely you've seen the film of this conversation already."

"Of course I have."

"But you've forgotten some of the details?"

"I rarely forget anything," Carvajal said, sighing.

"Then you must know what else I'm going to ask."

"Yes," he admitted.

"Even so, you won't answer it unless I ask it."

"Yes."

"Suppose I don't," I said. "Suppose I just leave right now, without doing what I'm supposed to have done."

"That won't be possible," said Carvajal evenly. "I remember the course this conversation must take. You don't leave before asking your next question. There's only one way for things to happen. You have no choice but to say and do the things I *saw* you say and do."

"Are you a god, decreeing the events of my life?"

He smiled wanly and shook his head. "Very much mortal, Mr. Nichols. Decreeing nothing. I tell you, though, the future's immutable. What you think of as the future. We're both actors in a script that can't be rewritten. Come, now. Let's play out our script. Ask me —"

"— No. I'm going to break the pattern and walk out of here."

"— about Paul Quinn's future," he said.

I was already at the door. But when he spoke Quinn's name, I halted. That was, of course, the question I had been going to ask, the question I had come here to ask, the question I had determined not to ask when I began to play my little game with immutable destiny. How poorly I had played! How sweetly Carvajal had maneuvered me! Because I was helpless, defeated, immobilized. You may think I was still free to walk out, but no, but no, not once he had invoked Quinn's name, not now that he had tantalized me with the promise of desired knowledge, not now that Carvajal had demonstrated once more, crushingly, conclusively, the precision of his oracular gift.

"You say it," I muttered. "You ask the question."

He sighed. "If you wish."

"I insist."

"You mean to ask if Paul Quinn is going to become President."

"That's it," I said hollowly.

"I think he will."

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"You *think?* That's the best you can tell me? You *think* he will?"

"I don't know."

"You know everything!"

"No," Carvajal said. "Not everything. There are limits, and your question lies beyond them. The only answer I can give you is a mere guess, based on the same sort of factors anyone interested in politics would consider. Considering those factors, I think Quinn is likely to become President."

"But you don't know for sure. You can't *see* him becoming President."

"Exactly."

"It's beyond your range? Not in the immediate future?"

"Beyond my range, yes."

"Therefore you're telling me that Quinn won't be elected in 2000, but you think he's a good bet for 2004, although you aren't capable of *seeing* as far as 2004."

"Did you ever believe Quinn would be elected in 2000?" Carvajal asked.

"Never. Mortonson's unbeatable. That is, unless Mortonson happens to drop dead the way Leydecker did, in which case it's anybody's election, and Quinn —" I paused. "What do you see in store for Mortonson? Will he live as long as the election of 2000?"

"I don't know," said Carvajal quietly.

"You don't know that either? The election's seventeen months away. So your range of clairvoyance is less than seventeen months?"

"At present, yes."

"Has it ever been greater than that?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Much greater. I've seen thirty or forty years ahead, at times. But not now."

I felt Carvajal was playing with me again. Exasperated, I said, "Is there any chance your long-range vision will return? And give you, say, a vision of the 2004 election? Or even of the election of 2000?"

"Not really."

Sweat was pouring down my body. "Help me. It's extremely important for me to know whether Quinn's going to make it into the White House."

"Why?"

"Why, because I —" I stopped, astonished to realize I had no real answer beyond mere curiosity. I was committed to working for Quinn's election; presumably that commitment wasn't conditional on knowing I was working for a winner. Yet in the moments when I thought Carvajal was able to tell me, I had been desperate to know. Clumsily I said, "Because I'm, well, very much involved in his career, and I'd feel better knowing the direction it's likely to take,

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especially if I knew all our effort on his behalf wasn't going to go to waste. I — ah —" I halted, feeling inane.

Carvajal said, "I've given you the best answer I can. My guess is that your man will become President."

"What you're saying is that your support of Quinn isn't based on absolute knowledge, only a hunch."

"What support of Quinn?"

His question, so innocent in tone, took me aback. "You thought he'd make a good mayor. You want him to become President," I said.

"I did? I do?"

"You gave huge sums to his campaign treasury when he was running for mayor. What is that if it isn't support? In March you showed up at the office of one of his chief strategists and offered to do everything you could to help Quinn attain higher office. That isn't support?"

"It's of no concern to me at all whether Paul Quinn ever wins another election," Carvajal said.

"Then why are you willing to contribute so heavily to his election kitty? Why are you willing to offer handy tips about the future to his campaign managers? Why are you willing —"

"Willing?"

"Willing, yes. Did I use the wrong word?"

"Will has nothing to do with it, Mr. Nichols."

"The more I talk with you, the less I understand."

"Will implies choice, freedom, volition. There are no such concepts in my life. I give to Quinn because I know I must, not because I prefer him to other politicians. I came to Lombroso's office in March because I *saw* myself, months ago, going there, and knew that I had to go that day, no matter what I'd rather be doing. I live in this crumbling neighborhood because I've never been granted a view of myself living anywhere else. I tell you what I've been telling you today because this conversation is already as familiar to me as a movie I've seen fifty times, and so I know that I must tell you things I've never told to another human being. I never ask why. My life is without surprises, Mr. Nichols, and it is without decisions, and it is without volition. I do what I know I must do, and I know I must do it because I've *seen* myself doing it."

His placid words terrified me more than any of the real or imagined horrors of the dark staircase outside. Never before had I looked into a universe from which free will, chance, the unexpected, the random, had all been banished. I saw Carvajal as a man dragged helpless but uncom-

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plaining through the present by his inflexible vision of the immutable future. It frightened me, but after a moment the dizzying terror was gone, never to return; for after the first appalling perception of Carvajal as tragic victim came another, more exalting, of Carvajal as one whose gift was the ultimate refinement of my own, one who has moved beyond the vagaries of chance into a realm of utter predictability. I was drawn irresistibly to him by that insight. I felt our souls interpenetrate, and knew I would never be free of him again. It was as though that cold force emanating from him, that chilly radiance born of his strangeness that had made him so repellent to me, had now reversed its sign and pulled me toward him.

I said, "You always act out the scenes you *see?*"

"Always."

"You never try to change the script?"

"Never."

"Because you're afraid of what might happen if you do?"

He shook his head. "How could I possibly be afraid of anything? What we fear is the unknown, isn't it? No: I obediently read the lines of the script because I know there's no alternative. What looks to you like the future is to me more like the past, something already experienced, something it would be futile to attempt to alter. I give money to Quinn, you see, because *I have already done so* and have perceived that giving. How could I *see* myself having given, if I fail in fact to give when the moment of my vision intersects the moment of my 'present'?"

"Do you ever worry about forgetting the script and doing the wrong thing when the moment comes?"

Carvajal chuckled. "If you could ever for an instant *see* as I see, you'd know how empty that question is. There's no way to do 'the wrong thing.' There's only 'the right thing,' that which happens, that which is real. I perceive what will happen; eventually it takes place; I am an actor in a drama that allows for no improvisations, as are you, as are we all."

"And you've never even once attempted to rewrite the script? In some small detail? Not even once?"

"Oh, yes, more than once, Mr. Nichols, and not only small details. When I was younger, much younger, before I understood. I would have a vision of some calamity, say a child running in front of a truck or a house on fire, and I would decide to play God, to prevent the calamity from occurring."

"And?"

"No way. However I planned things, when the moment came,

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the event invariably happened as I had *seen* it happen. Always. Circumstances prevented me from preventing anything. Many times I experimented with changing the predestined course of events, and I never succeeded, and eventually I stopped trying."

"And you accept this fully?" I asked. I paced the room, restless, agitated, overheated. "To you the book of time is written and sealed and unalterable? Kismet and no arguments?"

"Kismet and no arguments," he said.

"Isn't that a pretty forlorn philosophy?"

He seemed faintly amused. "It's not a philosophy, Mr. Nichols. It's an accommodation to the nature of reality. Look, do you 'accept' the present?"

"What?"

"As things happen to you, do you recognize them as valid events? Or do you see them as conditional and mutable; do you have the feeling that you could change them in the moment they're happening?"

"Of course not. How could anybody change —"

"Precisely. One can try to redirect the course of one's future, one can even edit and reconstruct one's memories of the past, but nothing can be done about the moment itself as it flows into being and assumes existence."

"So?"

"To others the future looks alterable because it's inaccessible. One has the illusion of being able to create one's own future, to carve it out of the matrix of time yet unborn. But what I perceive when I *see,*" he said, "is the 'future' only in terms of my temporary position in the time-flow. In truth it's also the 'present,' the unalterable immediate present, of myself at a different position in the time-flow. Or perhaps at the same position in a different time-flow. Oh, I have many clever theories, Mr. Nichols. But they all come to the same conclusion: that what I witness isn't a hypothetical and conditional future, subject to modification through rearrangement of antecedent factors, but rather a real and unalterable event, as fixed as the present or the past. I can no more change it than you can change a motion picture as you sit watching it in a theater. I came to understand this a long time ago. And to accept. And to accept."

"How long have you had the power to *see?*"

Shrugging, Carvajal said, "All my life, I suppose. When I was a child I couldn't comprehend it; it was like a fever that came over me, a vivid dream, a delirium. I didn't know I was experiencing — shall we say, flashforwards? But then I found myself living through

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episodes I had previously 'dreamed.' That *deja vu* sensation, Mr. Nicols, that I'm sure you've experienced now and then — it was my daily companion. There were times when I felt like a puppet, jerking about on strings while someone spoke my lines out of the sky. Gradually I discovered that no one else experienced the *deja vu* feeling as often or as intensely as I. I think I must have been twenty before I fully understood what I was, and close to thirty before I really came to terms with it. Of course I never revealed myself to anyone else, not until today, in fact."

"Because there was no one you trusted?"

"Because it wasn't in the script," he said with maddening smugness.

"You never married?"

"No."

"Did you want to?"

"How could I want to? How could I want what I had obviously not wanted? I never *saw* a wife for myself."

"And therefore you must never have been meant to have one."

"Never have been meant?" His eyes flashed strangely. "I don't like that phrase, Mr. Nichols. It implies that there's some conscious design in the universe, an author for the great script. I don't think there is. There's no need to introduce such a complication. The script writes itself, moment by moment, and the script showed that I lived alone. One doesn't need to say I was *meant* to be single. Sufficient to say that I *saw* myself to be single, and so I *would* be single, and so I *was* single, and so I *am* single."

"The language lacks the proper tenses for a case like yours," I said.

"But you follow my meaning?"

"I think so. Would it be right to say that 'future' and 'present' are merely different names for the same events seen from different points of view?"

"Not a bad approximation," said Carvajal. "I prefer to think of all events as simultaneous, and what is in motion is our perception of them, that moving point of consciousness, not the events themselves."

"And sometimes it's given to someone to perceive events from several viewpoints at the same time, is that it?"

"I have many theories," he said vaguely. "Perhaps one of them is correct. What matters is the vision itself, not the explanation. And I have the vision."

"You could have used it to make millions," I said, gesturing at the shabby apartment.

"I did."

"No, I mean a really gigantic

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fortune, Rockefeller plus Getty plus Croesus, a financial empire on a scale the world's never seen. Power. Ultimate luxury. Women. Control of whole continents."

"It wasn't in the script," Carvajal said.

"And you accepted the script."

"The script admits of nothing other than acceptance. I thought you understood that point."

"So you made money, a lot of money but nothing like what you could have made, and it was all meaningless to you? You just let it pile up around you like falling autumn leaves?"

"I had no need of it. My needs are simple and my tastes are plain. I accumulated it because I *saw* myself playing the market and growing rich. What I *see* myself do, I do."

"Following the script. No questions asked about why."

"No questions asked."

"Millions of dollars. What have you done with it all?"

"I used it as I *saw* myself using it. I gave some of it away, to charities, to universities, to politicians."

"According to your own preferences or to the design you *saw* unfolding?"

"I have no preferences," he said calmly.

"And the rest of the money?"

"I kept it. In banks. What would I have done with it? It's never had any importance to me. As you say, meaningless. A million dollars, five million, ten million — just words." An odd wistful note crept into his voice. "What does have meaning?" What does 'meaning' mean? We merely play out the script, Mr. Nichols. Would you like another glass of water?"

"Please," I said, and the millionaire filled my glass.

My mind was whirling. I had come for answers, and I had had them, dozens of them, yet each had raised a cluster of new questions. Which he was willing to answer, evidently, for no reason other than that he *had* already answered them in his visions of this day. Talking to Carvajal, I found myself slipping between past and future tenses, lost in a grammatical maze of jumbled time and disordered sequences. And he was altogether placid, sitting almost motionless, his voice flat and sometimes nearly inaudible, his face without expression other than that peculiarly *destroyed* look. He might have been a zombie, or perhaps a robot. Living a rigid, preordained, fully programmed life, never questioning the motives for any of his actions, simply going on and on, a puppet dangling from his own inevitable future, drifting in a deterministic existential passivity that I found bewildering and alien.

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For a moment I found myself pitying him. Then I wondered whether my compassion might not be misplaced. I felt the temptation of that existential passivity, and it was a powerful tug.

He said suddenly, "I think you should go now. I'm not accustomed to long conversations and I'm afraid this has tired me."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stay so long."

"No need to apologize. All that happened today was as I *saw* it would be. So all is well."

"I'm grateful that you were willing to talk so openly about yourself," I said.

"Willing?" he said, laughing. "*Willing*, again?"

"That word isn't in your working vocabulary?"

"No. And I hope to wipe it from yours." He moved toward the door in a gesture of dismissal. "We'll talk again soon."

"I'd like that."

"I regret I couldn't help you as much as you wished. Your question about what Paul Quinn will become — I'm sorry. The answer lies beyond my limits and I have no information to give. I can perceive only what I *will* perceive, do you see? Do you understand? I perceive only my own future perceptions, as though I look at the future through a periscope, and my periscope shows me nothing about next year's election."

He took my hand a moment. I felt a current flowing between us, a distinct and almost tangible river of connection. I sensed great strain in him, not merely the strain of the conversation but something deeper, a strugle to maintain and extend that contact between us, to reach me on some profound level of being. The sensation disturbed and unsettled me. It lasted only an instant; then it snapped, and I fell back into aloneness with a perceptible impact of separation, and he smiled, gave me a courtly little nod of the head, wished me a safe journey home, showed me into the dark dank hallway.

Only as I was getting into my car, a few minutes later, did all the pieces slip into place, and I come to comprehend what Carvajal had been telling me as we stood by the door. Only then did I understand the nature of the ultimate limit that governed his vision, that had turned him into the passive puppet he was, that had stripped all meaning from his actions. Carvajal had *seen* the moment of his own death. That was why he was unable to tell me who the next President was, yes, but the effect of that knowledge ran deeper than that. It explained why he drifted through life in that peculiarly unquestioning, uncaring way. For decades Carvajal must have lived with the

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awareness of how and where and when he would die, the absolute and indubitable knowledge of it, and that terrible knowledge had paralyzed his will in a fashion hard for ordinary people to grasp. That was my intuitive interpretation of his condition, and I trust my intuitions. Now the time of his end was less than seventeen months away; and he was drifting aimlessly toward it, accepting, playing out the script, not caring, not caring at all.

17.

My head was whirling as I drove home, and it went on whirling for days. I felt stoned, drunk, intoxicated with a sense of infinite possibilities, of limitless openings. It was as though I was about to tap into some incredible source of energy toward which I had been moving, unknowingly, all my life.

That source of energy was Carvajal's visionary power.

I had gone to him suspecting he was what he was, and he had confirmed it, but he had done more than that. He had poured his story out to me so readily, once we were past the game-playing and the testing, that he seemed to be trying to lure me into some sort of relationship based on that gift we so unequally shared.

What did Carvajal want from me? What role did he have in mind for me? Friend? Appreciative one-man audience? Partner? Disciple?

Heir?

All of those suggested themselves to me. But there was also the possibility that I was altogether deluded, that Carvajal had no role in mind for me at all. Roles are created by playwrights, and Carvajal was an actor, not a playwright. He simply picked up his cues and followed the script. And maybe to Carvajal I was merely a new character who had wandered onto the stage to engage him in conversation, who had appeared for reasons unknown to him and irrelevant to him, for reasons that mattered, if at all, only to the invisible and perhaps nonexistent author of the grand drama of the universe.

That was an aspect of Carvajal that bothered me profoundly, in a way that drunks have always bothered me. The boozer — or doper, or sniffer, or what-have-you — is in the most literal sense a person who is out of his right mind. Which means you can't take his words or his actions seriously. Let him say he loves you, let him say he hates you, let him tell you how much he admires your work or respects your integrity or shares your beliefs, and you can't ever

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know how sincere he is, because the booze or dope may be putting the words in his mouth. Let him propose a deal, and you don't know how much he'll remember when his head is straight again. So your transaction with him while he's under the influence is essentially hollow and unreal. I'm an orderly and rational person, and when I deal with someone, I want to feel I'm having a real interaction with him. Not so, when I think I'm genuinely interacting and the other one is just saying whatever comes into his chemically altered head.

With Carvajal I felt many of the same uncertainties. He didn't act out of what I thought of as rational motives, such as self-interest or the general welfare; everything, even his own survival, seemed irrelevant to him. Thus his actions sidestepped stochasticity and common sense itself: he was unpredictable because he didn't follow discernible patterns, only the script, the sacred and unalterable script; and the script was revealed to him in bursts of nonlogical nonsequential insight. "What I *see* myself do, I do," he had said. Never asking why. Fine. He *sees* himself giving all his money to the poor, and so he gives all his money to the poor. He *sees* himself crossing the George Washington Bridge on a pogo stick, and so he goes jumping away. He *sees* himself putting H2SO4 in his guest's waterglass, and so he pops the old sulfuric in without hesitating. He answers questions with the preordained answers, whether what is preordained makes sense or not. And so on. Having surrendered totally to the dictates of the revealed future, he has no need to examine motives or consequences. Worse than a drunk, in fact. At least a boozer still has some shred of rational consciousness operating, however fuzzily, at the core.

Perhaps I was being too harsh, though. Maybe there were patterns I failed to see. It was possible that Carvajal's interest in me was real, that he had some genuine use for me in his lonely life. To be my guide, to be a father surrogate to me, to pour into me, in the remaining months of his time, such knowledge as he was able to impart.

In any event I had real use for him. I was going to have him help me make Paul Quinn President.

Knowing that Carvajal couldn't *see* as far as next year's election was a drawback, but not necessarily a major one. Events as big as the presidential succession have deep roots; decisions taken now would govern the political twists and turns of the years ahead; Carvajal might already be in possession of sufficient data about

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the coming year to enable Quinn to construct alliances that would sweep him to the 2004 nomination. Such was my obsession that I intended to manipulate Carvajal for Quinn's benefit. By cunning question-and-answer I might be able to pry vital information out of the little man.

18.

It was a troublesome week. On the political front the news was all bad. New Democrats everywhere were falling all over themselves to pledge their support to Senator Kane, and Kane, instead of keeping his vice-presidential options open in the traditional manner of front-running politicians, felt so secure that he cheerfully told a press conference that he would like to see Socorro share the ticket with him. Quinn, who had begun to gain a national following after the oil-gellation thing, abruptly ceased to matter to party leaders west of the Hudson River. Invitations to speak stopped coming in; the requests for autographed photos dried to a trickle — trifling signs, but significant ones. Quinn knew what was going on, and he wasn't happy about it.

"How did it happen so fast, this Kane-Socorro tie-up?" he demanded. "One day I was the great white hope of the party; the next, all the clubhouse doors were slamming in my face. He gave us the famously intense Quinn stare, eyes clicking from one man to another, searching out the one who somehow had failed him. His presence was as overwhelming as ever; the presence of his disappointment was almost intolerably painful.

"Wait," I promised him. "New patterns are shaping up. Give me a month and I'll have all of next year mapped out for you."

"I'll settle for the next six weeks," Quinn said grumpily.

His annoyance subsided after a couple of tense days. He was too busy with local problems, of which there were suddenly a great many — the traditional hot-weather social unrest that hits New York every summer like a cloud of mosquitoes — to fret very long about a nomination he hadn't actually wanted to win.

It was a week of domestic problems too. Sundara's ever-deepening involvement with the Transit Creed was beginning to get to me. Her behavior now was as wild, as unpredictable, as motiveless as Carvajal's; but they were coming to their crazy randomness from opposite directions, Carvajal's behavior governed by blind obedience to an inexplicable revelation, Sundara's by the desire

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to break free of all pattern and structure.

Whim reigned. The day I went to see Carvajal, she quietly went over to the Municipal Building to apply for a prostitute's license. It took her the better part of the afternoon, what with the medical exam, the union interview, the photography and fingerprinting, and all the rest of the bureaucratic intricacies. When I came home, my head full of Carvajal, she triumphantly flourished the little laminated card that made it legal for her to sell her body anywhere in the five boroughs.

"My God," I said.

"Is something wrong?"

"You just stood there in line like any twenty-dollar hooker out of Vegas?"

"Should I have used political influence to get my card?"

"What if some reporter had seen you down there, though?"

"So?"

"The wife of Lew Nichols, Special Administrative Assistant to Mayor Quinn, joining the whores' union?"

"Do you think I'm the only married woman in the union?"

"I don't mean that. I'm thinking in terms of potential scandal, Sundara."

"Prostitution is a legal activity, and regulated prostitution is generally recognized as having social benefits which —"

"It's legal in New York City," I said. "Not in Kankakee. Not in Tallahassee. Not in Sioux City. One of these days Quinn's going to be looking for votes in those places and others like them, maybe, and some wise guy will dig up the information that one of Quinn's closest advisers is married to a woman who sells her body in a public brothel, and —"

"Am I supposed to govern my life by Quinn's need to conform to the morality of small-town voters?" she asked, dark eyes blazing, color glowing under the darkness of her cheeks.

"Do you *want* to be a whore, Sundara?"

"Prostitute is the term that the union leadership prefers to use."

"Prostitute isn't any prettier than whore. Aren't you satisfied with the sort of arrangements we've been making? Why do you want to sell yourself?"

"What I want to be," she said icily, "is a free human being, released from all constricting ego attachments."

"And you'll get there through prostitution?"

"Prostitutes learn to dismantle their egos. Prostitutes exist only to serve the needs of others. A week or two in a city brothel will teach me how to subordinate the demands of my ego to the needs of

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those who come to me."

"You could become a nurse. You could become a masseuse. You could —"

"I chose what I chose."

"And that's what you're going to do? Spend the next week or two in a city brothel?"

"Probably."

"Did Catalina Yarber suggest this?"

"I thought of it myself," said Sundara solemnly. Her eyes flashed fire. We were at the edge of the worst quarrel of our life together, a straight I-forbid-this/don't-you-give-me-orders clash. I trembled. I pictured Sundara, sleek and elegant, Sundara whom all men and many women desired, punching the time clock in one of those grim sterile municipal cubicles, Sundara standing at a sink swabbing her loins with antiseptic lotions, Sundara on her narrow cot with her knees pulled up to her breasts, servicing some stubble-faced sweat-stinking clod while an endless line waited, tickets in hand, at her door. No. I couldn't swallow it. Four-group, six-group, ten-group, whatever kind of communal sex she liked, yes, but not n-group, not infinity-group, not offering her precious tender body to every hideous misfit in New York City who had the price of admission. For an instant I really was tempted to rise up in old-fashioned husbandly wrath and tell her to drop all this foolishness, or else. But of course that was impossible. So I said nothing, while chasms opened between us. We were on separate islands in a stormy sea, borne away from one another by mighty surging currents, and I was unable even to shout across the widening strait, unable even to reach toward her with futile hands. Where had it gone, the oneness that had been ours for a few years? Why was the strait growing wider?

"Go to your whorehouse, then," I muttered, and left the apartment in a blind wild unstochastic frenzy of anger and fear.

Instead of registering at a brothel, though, Sundara podded to JFK Airport and boarded a rocket bound for India. She bathed in the Ganges at one of the Benares ghats, spent an hour unsuccessfully searching for her family's ancestral neighborhood in Bombay, had a curry dinner at Green's Hotel, and caught the next rocket home. Her pilgrimage covered forty hours in toto and cost her exactly forty dollars an hour. I had the good sense not to make an issue of it. In any case I was helpless; Sundara was a free being and growing more free every day, and it was her privilege to consume her own money on anything she

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chose, even crazy overnight excursions to India. I was careful not to ask her, in the days following her return, whether she planned actually to use her new prostitute's license. Perhaps she already had. I preferred not to know.

19.

A week after my visit to Carvajal, he phoned to ask if I cared to have lunch with him the next day. So I met Carvajal, at his suggestion, at the Merchants and Shippers Club down in the financial district.

The venue surprised me. Merchants and Shippers is one of those venerable Wall Street watering holes populated exclusively by high-echelon brokers and bankers on a members-only basis, and when I say exclusively, I mean that even Bob Lombroso, who is a tenth-generation American and very much a power on the Street, is tacitly barred from membership by his Judaism and chooses not to make a fuss about it. As in all such places, wealth alone isn't enough to get you in: you must be clubbable, a congenial and decorous man of the right ancestry who went to the right schools and belongs to the right firm. So far as I could see, Carvajal had nothing going for him along those lines. His *richess* was *nouveau,* and he was by nature an outsider, with none of the required prepschool background and high corporate affiliations. How had he managed to wangle a membership?

"I inherited it," he told me smugly as we settled into cozy resilient well-upholstered chairs beside a window sixty stories above the turbulent street. "One of my forefathers was a founding member, in 1823. The charter provides that the eleven founding memberships descend automatically to the eldest sons of eldest sons, world without end. Some very disreputable sorts have marred the sanctity of the organization because of that clause." He flashed a sudden and surprisingly wicked grin. "I come here about once every five years. You'll notice I've worn my best suit."

Indeed he had — a pleated gold-and-green herringbone doublet that was perhaps a decade past its prime but still had far more glitter and dash than the rest of his dim and fusty wardrobe. Carvajal, in fact, seemed considerably transformed today, more animated, more vigorous, even playful, distinctly younger than the bleak and ashen man I had come to know.

I said, "I didn't realize you had ancestors."

"There were Carvajals in the New World long before the Mayflower set out for Plymouth,"

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he said. "We were very important in Florida in the early eighteenth century. When the English annexed Florida in 1763, one branch of the family moved to New York, and I think there was a time when we owned half the waterfront and most of the Upper West Side. But we were wiped out in the Panic of 1837, and I'm the first member of the family in a century and a half who's risen above genteel poverty. But even in the worst times we kept up our hereditary membership in the club." He gestured at the splendid redwood-paneled walls, the gleaming chrome-trimmed windows, the discreet recessed lighting. Carvajal said, "I'll never forget the first time my father brought me here for cocktails. I was about eighteen, so that would be, say, 1957. The club hadn't moved into this building yet, it was still over on Broad Street in a cobwebbed nineteenth-century place, and we came in, my father and I, in our twenty-dollar suits and our wool neckties, and everyone looked like a senator to me, even the waiters, but no one sneered at us, no one patronized us. I had my first martini and my first filet mignon, and it was like an excursion to Valhalla, you know, or to Versailles. A visit to a strange dazzling world where everyone was rich and powerful and magnificent. And as I sat at the huge old oak table across from my father, a vision came to me, I began to *see*, I *saw* myself as an old man, the man I am today, dried out, with a fringe of gray hair here and there, the elderly self that I had already come to know and recognize, and that older me was sitting in a room that was truly opulent, a room of sleek lines and brilliantly imaginative furnishings, in fact this very room where we are now, and I was sharing a table with a much younger man, a tall, strongly built, dark-haired man, who leaned forward, staring at me in a tense and uncertain way, listening to my every word as if he were trying to memorize it. Then the vision passed and I was with my father again, and he was asking me if I was all right, and I tried to pretend it was the martini hitting me all at once that had made my eyes glaze over and my face go slack, for I wasn't much of a drinker even then. And I wondered if what I had *seen* was a kind of resonant counterimage of my father and me at the club; that is, I had *seen* my older self bringing my own son to the Merchants and Shippers Club of the distant future. For several years I speculated about who my wife would be and what my son would be like, and then I came to know that there would be no wife and no son. And the years went by and

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here we are, and there you sit opposite me, leaning forward, staring at me in a tense and uncertain way—"

A shiver rippled along my backbone. "You *saw* me here with you, more than forty years ago?"

He nodded nonchalantly and, in the same gesture, swung round to summon a waiter, stabbing the air with his forefinger as imperiously as though he were J. P. Morgan. The waiter hurried to Carvajal's side and greeted him obsequiously by name. Carvajal ordered a martini for me — because he had *seen* it long ago? — and dry sherry for himself.

"They treat you courteously here," I remarked.

"It's a point of honor for them to treat every member as if he's the Czar's cousin," Carvajal said. "What they say about me in private is probably less flattering. My membership is going to die with me, and I imagine the club will be relieved that no more shabby little Carvajals will deface the premises."

The drinks arrived almost at once. Solemnly we dipped glasses at one another in a perfunctory vestigial toast.

"To the future," Carvajal said, "the radiant, beckoning future," and broke into hoarse laughter.

"You're in lively spirits today."

"Yes, I feel bouncier than I have in years. A second springtime for the old man, eh?"

His ebullience was disconcerting and almost frightening. At our other two meetings Carvajal had appeared to be drawing on reservoirs of strength long since overdrawn, but today he seemed speedy, frantic, full of a wild energy obtained from some hideous source.

He said suddenly, "Tell me, Lew, have you ever had moments of second sight?"

"I think so. Nothing as vivid as what you must experience, of course. But I think many of my hunches are based on flickers of real vision — subliminal flickers that come and go so fast I don't acknowledge them."

"Very likely."

"And dreams," I said. "Often in dreams I have premonitions and presentiments that turn out to be correct. As though the future is floating toward me, knocking at the gates of my slumbering consciousness."

"The sleeping mind is much more receptive to things of that sort, yes."

"But what I perceive in dreams comes to me in symbolic form, a metaphor rather than a movie. Just before Gilmartin was caught I dreamed he was being hauled before a firing squad, for example. As though the right information

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was reaching me, but not in literal one-to-one terms."

"No," Carvajal said. "The message came accurately and literally, but your mind scrambled and coded it, because you were asleep and unable to operate your receptors properly. Only the waking rational mind can process and integrate such messages reliably. But most people who are awake reject the messages altogether, and when they are asleep their minds do mischief to what comes in."

"You think many people get messages from the future?"

"I think everyone does," Carvajal said vehemently. "The future isn't the inaccessible, intangible realm it's thought to be. But so few admit its existence except as an abstract concept. So few let its messages reach them!" A weird intensity had come into his expression. He lowered his voice and said, "The future isn't a verbal construct. It's a place with an existence of its own. Right now, as we sit here, we are also *there, there* $+1$, *there* $+ 2$, *there* $+ n$ — an infinity of *theres*, all of them at once, both previous to and later than our current position along our timeline. Those other positions are neither more nor less 'real' than this one. They're merely in a place that happens not to be the place where the seat of our perceptions is currently located."

"But occasionally our perceptions —"

"Cross over," Carvajal said. "Wander into other segments of the time-line. Pick up events or moods or scraps of conversation that don't belong to 'now.'"

"Do our perceptions wander," I asked, "or is it the events themselves that are insecurely anchored in their own 'now'?"

He shrugged. "Does that matter? There's no way of knowing."

"You don't care how it works? Your whole life has been shaped by this, and you simply don't —"

"I told you," Carvajal said, "that I have many theories. So many, indeed, that they tend to cancel one another out. Lew, Lew, do you think I don't care? I've spent all my life trying to understand my gift, my power, and I can answer any of your questions with a dozen answers, each as plausible as the next. The two-time-line theory, for example. Have I told you about that?"

"No."

"Well, then." Coolly he produced a pen and drew two firm lines, parallel to one another, across the tablecloth. He labeled the ends of one line X and Y, the other X' and Y'. "This line that runs from X to Y is the course of history as we know it. It begins

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with the creation of the universe at X and ends with thermodynamic equilibrium at Y, all right? And these are some significant dates along its path." With fussy little strokes he sketched in crossbars, beginning at the side of the table closer to himself and proceeding toward me. "This is the era of Neanderthal man. This is the time of Jesus. This is 1939, the start of World War II. Also the start of Martin Carvajal, by the way. When were you born? Around 1970?"

"1966."

"1966. All right. This is you, 1966. And this is the present year, 1999. Let's say you're going to live to be ninety. This is the year of your death, then, 2056. So much for line X-Y. Now this other line, X'-Y' — that's also the course of history in this universe, the very same course of history denoted by the other line. *Only it runs the other way.*"

"What?"

"Why not? Suppose there are many universes, each independent of all the others, each containing its unique set of suns and planets on which events occur unique to that universe. An infinity of universes, Lew. Is there any logical reason why time has to flow in the same direction in all of them?"

"Entropy," I mumbled. "The laws of thermodynamics. Time's arrow. Cause and effect."

"I won't quarrel with any of those ideas. So far as I know, they're all valid within a closed system," said Carvajal. "But one closed system has no entropic responsibilities relative to another closed system, does it? Time can tick from A to Z in one universe and from Z to A in another, but only an observer outside both universes is going to know that, so long as within each universe the daily flow runs from cause to effect and not the other way. Will you admit the logic of that?"

I shut my eyes a moment. "All right. We have an infinity of universes all separate from one another, and the direction of time-flow in any of them may seem topsy-turvy relative to all the others. So?"

"In an infinity of anything, all possible cases exist, yes?"

"Yes. By definition."

"Then you'll also agree," Carvajal said, "that out of that infinity of unconnected universes there may be one that's identical to ours in all particulars, except only the direction of its flow of time relative to the flow of time here."

"I'm not sure I grasp —"

"Look," he said impatiently, pointing to the line that ran across the tablecloth from X' to Y'. "Here's another universe, side by side with our own. Everything that happens in ours, down to the most

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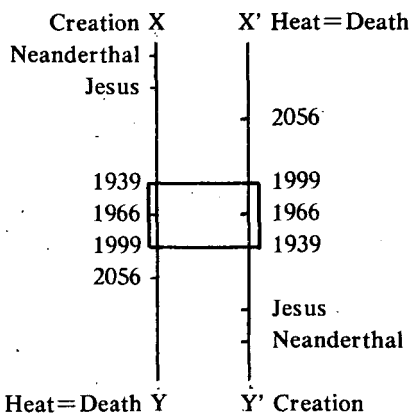
minute detail. But in this one the creation is at Y' instead of X and the heat-death of the universe is at X' instead of Y. Down here —" he sketched a crossbar across the second line near my end of the table — "is the era of Neanderthal man. Here's the Crucifixion. Here's 1939, 1966, 1999, 2056. The same events, the same key dates, but running back to front. That is, they look back to front if you happen to live in this universe and can manage to get a peek into the other one. Over there, naturally, everything seems to be running in the right direction." Carvajal extended the 1939 and 1999 crossbars on the X-Y line until they intersected the X'-Y' line, and he did the same for the 1999 and 1939 crossbars on the second line. Then he bracketed both sets of crossbars by connecting their ends, to form a pattern like this:



A waiter passing by glanced at what Carvajal was doing to the tablecloth and, coughing slightly, moved on, saying nothing, keeping his face rigid. Carvajal didn't seem to notice. He continued, "Let's suppose, now, that a person is born in the X-Y universe who is able, God knows why, to see occasionally into the X'-Y' universe. Me. Here I am, going from 1939 to 1999 in X-Y, peeking across now and then into X'-Y' and observing the events of their years 1939 to 1999, which are the same as ours except that they're flowing by in the reverse order, so at the time of my birth here everything in my entire X-Y lifetime has already happened in X'-Y'. When my consciousness connects with the consciousness of my other self over there, I catch him reminiscing about his past, which coincidentally is my future."

"Very neat."

"Yes. The ordinary person confined to a single universe can roam his memory at will, wandering around freely in his own past. But I have access to the memory of someone who's living in the opposite direction, which allows me to 'remember' the future as well as the past. That is, if the two-time-lines theory is correct."

"And is it?"

"How would I know?" Carvajal asked. "It's only a plausible

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operational hypothesis to explain what happens when I *see*. But how could I confirm it?"

I said, after a time, "The things you *see* — do they come to you in reverse chronological order? The future unrolling in a continuous scroll, that sort of thing?"

"No. Never. No more than your memories form a single continuous scroll. I get fitful glimpses, fragments of scenes, sometimes extended passages that have an apparent duration of ten or fifteen minutes or more, but always a random jumble, never any linear sequence, never anything at all consecutive. I learned to find the larger pattern myself, to remember sequences and hook them together in a likely order. It was like learning to read Babylonian poetry by deciphering cuneiform inscriptions on broken, scrambled bricks. Gradually I worked out clues to guide me in my reconstructions of the future: this is how my face will look when I'm forty, when I'm fifty, when I'm sixty; these are clothes I wore from 1965 to 1973; this is the period when I had a mustache, when my hair was dark — oh, a whole host of little references and associations and footnotes, which eventually became so familiar to me that I could *see* any scene, even the most brief, and place it within a matter of weeks or even days. Not easy at first, but second nature by this time."

"Are you *seeing* right now?"

"No," he said. "It takes effort to induce the state. It's rather like a trance." A wintry look swept his face. "At its most powerful it's a kind of double vision, one world overlying the other, so that I can't be entirely sure which world I'm inhabiting and which is the world I *see*. Even after all these years I haven't fully adjusted to that disorientation, that confusion." He may have shuddered then. "Usually it's not so intense. For which I'm grateful."

"Could you show me what it's like?"

"Here? Now?"

"If you would."

His expression changed, his eyes becoming glazed and fixed as though he were watching a motion picture from the last row of a huge theater, or perhaps as if he were entering deep meditation. His pupils dilated, and the aperture, once widened, remained constant regardless of the fluctuations of light as people walked past our table. His face showed evidence of great strain. His breathing was slow, hoarse, and regular. He sat perfectly still; he seemed altogether absent. A minute, maybe, elapsed; for me it was unendurably long. Then his fixity shattered like a falling icicle. He relaxed, shoulders slumping forward; color came to

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his cheeks in a quick pumping burst; his eyes watered and grew dull; he reached with a shaky hand for his water glass and gulped its contents.

At length Carvajal said, "How long was I gone?"

"Only a few moments. It seemed a much longer time than it actually was."

"It was half an hour for me. At least."

"What did you *see?*"

He shrugged. "Nothing I haven't *seen* before. The same scenes recur, you know, five, ten, two dozen times. As they do in memory. But memory alters things. The scenes I *see* never change."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"It was nothing," he said offhandedly. "Something that's going to happen next spring. You were there. We're going to spend a lot of time together, you and I, in the months to come."

"What was I doing?"

"Watching."

"Watching what?"

"Watching me," Carvajal said. He smiled, and it was a skeletal smile, a terrible bleak smile, a smile like all the smiles he had smiled that first day in Lomroso's office. All the unexpected buoyancy of twenty minutes ago had gone out of him. I wished I hadn't asked for the demonstration; I felt as though I'd talked a dying man into dancing a jig. But after a brief interval of embarrassing silence he appeared to recover. He took a swaggering pull at his cigar, he finished his sherry, he sat straight again. "That's better," he said. "It can be exhausting sometimes. Suppose we ask for the menu now, eh?"

"Are you really all right?"

"Perfectly."

"I'm sorry I asked you to —"

"Don't worry about it," he said. "It wasn't as bad as it must have looked to you."

"Was it frightening, the thing you *saw?*"

"Frightening? No, no, not frightening. I told you, it was nothing I haven't *seen* before. I'll tell you about it one of these days." He summoned the waiter. "I think it's time to have lunch," he said.

My menu bore no prices, a sign of class. The list of offerings was incredible: baked salmon steak, Maine lobster, roast sirloin, filet of sole, a whole roster of unobtainables, none of your dreary latter-day soybean clevernesses and seaweed confections. Having no idea what anything cost, I ordered blithely, cherrystone clams and the sirloin. Carvajal opted for shrimp cocktail and the salmon. He declined wine but urged me to get a half bottle. The list was priceless; I picked a '91 Latour, probably twenty-five bucks.

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Carvajal was watching me closely. He was more of a puzzle than ever. Certainly he wanted something from me; certainly he had some use for me. He seemed almost to be courting me, in his remote, inarticulate, secretive way. But he was giving no hints. I felt like a man playing poker blindfolded against an opponent who could see my hand.

The demonstration of *seeing* that I had extracted from him had been so disturbing a punctuation of our conversation that I hesitated to return to the subject, and for a time we talked aimlessly and amiably about wine, food, the stock market, the national economy, politics, and similar neutral themes. Unavoidably we came around to the topic of Paul Quinn, and the air seemed to grow perceptively heavier.

He said, "Quinn's doing a good job, isn't he?"

"I think so."

"He must be the city's most popular mayor in decades. He does have charm, eh? And tremendous energy. Too much, sometimes, yes? He often seems impatient, unwilling to go through the usual political channels to get things done."

"I suppose," I said. "He's impetuous, sure. A fault of youth. He isn't even forty years old, remember."

"He should go easier. There are times when his impatience makes him high-handed. Mayor Gottfried was high-handed, and you recall what happened to him."

"Gottfried was an out-and-out dictator. He tried to turn New York City into a police state, and—" I halted, dismayed. "Wait a second? Are you hinting that Quinn's in real danger of assassination?"

"Not really. No more than any other major political figure."

"Have you *seen* anything that—"

"No. Nothing."

"I have to know. If you're in possession of any sort of data concerning an attempt on the mayor's life, don't play games with it. I want to hear about it."

Carvajal looked amused. "You misunderstand. Quinn's in no personal danger that I'm aware of, and I chose my words badly if I implied that he is. What I meant is that Gottfried's tactics were gaining enemies for him. If he hadn't been murdered, he might, just might, have begun running into problems getting re-elected. Quinn's making enemies lately too. As he bypasses the City Council more and more, he's upsetting certain blocs of voters."

"The blacks, yes, but—"

"Not only the blacks. The Jews are getting unhappy about him."

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"I wasn't aware of that. The polls don't —"

"Not yet, no. But it'll begin to surface in a few months. His stand on that religious-instruction business in the schools, for example, has apparently already hurt him in the Jewish neighborhoods. And his comments about Israel at the dedication of the new Bank of Kuwait tower on Lexington Avenue —"

"That dedication doesn't take place for another three weeks," I pointed out.

Carvajal laughed. "It doesn't? Oh, I've mixed up again, haven't I! I did see his speech on television, I thought, but perhaps —"

"You didn't see it. You *saw* it."

"No doubt. No doubt."

"What is he going to say about Israel?"

"Just a few light quips. But the Jewish people here are extremely sensitive to such remarks, and the reaction wasn't — isn't going to be — good. They don't like Quinn's aggressiveness. Soon they'll start to think he doesn't have the right ideas about Israel. And they'll be grumbling out loud."

"When?"

"By autumn. The *Times* will do a front-page feature on the alienation of the Jewish electorate."

"No," I said. "I'll send Lombroso to do the Kuwait dedication in Quinn's place. That'll shut Quinn up and also remind everybody that we've got a Jew right at the highest level of the municipal administration."

"Oh, no, you can't do that," said Carvajal.

"Why not?"

"Because Quinn is going to speak. I *saw* him there."

"What if I arrange to have Quinn go to Alaska that week?"

"Please, Lew. Believe me: it's impossible for Quinn to be anywhere but at the Kuwait Bank building on the day of the dedication. Impossible."

"And impossible, too, I guess, for him to avoid making wisecracks about Israel, even if he's warned not to do it?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe this. I think if I go to him tomorrow and say, Hey, Paul, my reading is the Jewish voters are getting restless, so maybe skip that Kuwait thing, he'll skip it. Or else tone down his remarks."

"He'll go," said Carvajal quietly.

"No matter what I say or do?"

"No matter what you say or do, Lew."

I shook my head. "The future isn't as inflexible as you think. We *do* have some say about events yet to come. I'll talk to Quinn about the Kuwait ceremony."

"Please don't."

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"Why not?" I asked roughly. "Because you have some need to make the future turn out the right way?"

He seemed wounded by that. Gently he said, "Because I know the future always *does* turn out the right way."

"Quinn's interests are my interests. If you've *seen* him do something damaging to those interests, how can I sit still and let him go ahead and do it?"

"There's no choice."

"I don't know that yet."

Carvajal sighed. "If you raise the matter of the Kuwait ceremony with the mayor," he said ponderously, "you will have had your last access to the things I *see*."

"Is that a threat?"

"A statement that tends to make your prophecy self-fulfilling. You know I want your help; so you seal my lips with your threat; so of course the ceremony comes off the way you *saw* it. But what's the good of your telling me things if I'm not allowed to act on them? Why don't you risk giving me free rein? Are you so unsure of the strength of your visions that you have to take this way of guaranteeing that they'll come out right?"

"Very well," Carvajal said mildly, without malice. "You have free rein. Do as you please. We'll see what happens."

He had me. Once again he had outplayed me, for how did I dare risk losing access to his vision, and how could I predict what his reaction to my treachery would be?

I made a mental note to advise Quinn to start repairing his ties with the city's Jews — visit some kosher delicatessens, drop in at a few synagogues on Friday night.

"Are you angry with me for what I said a little while back?" I asked.

"I never get angry," Carvajal said.

"Hurt, then. You looked hurt when I said you need to make the future turn out the right way."

"I suppose I was. Because it shows how little you've understood me, Lew. As if you really do think I'm under some neurotic compulsion to fulfill my own visions. No, Lew. The patterns *can't* be upset, and until you accept that, there can't be any real kinship of thought between us, no sharing of vision. What you said saddened me because it revealed to me how far away from me you really are. But, no, no, I'm not angry with you."

We finished the meal in virtual silence and left without waiting for the check. The club would bill him, I supposed.

Outside, as we parted, Carvajal said, "Someday, when you *see* things yourself, you'll understand why Quinn has to say what I know he's going to say at the Kuwait

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Bank dedication."

"When I *see* things myself?"

"You will."

"I don't have the gift."

"Everyone has the gift," he said. "Very few know how to use it." He gave my forearm a quick squeeze and disappeared into the crowd on Wall Street.

20.

I didn't put through an immediate call to Quinn, but I came close to it. As soon as Carvajal was out of sight, I found myself wondering why I should hesitate. Carvajal's insights into things to come were demonstrably accurate; he had given me information important to Quinn's career; my responsibility to Quinn overrode all other considerations. Besides, Carvajal's concept of an inflexible, unchangeable future still seemed an absurdity to me. Anything that hadn't happened yet had to be subject to change; I could change it and I would, for Quinn's sake.

But I didn't put through the call.

Carvajal had asked me — ordered me, threatened me, warned me — not to intervene in this thing. But *could* Quinn skip the Kuwait dedication, even if I intervened? According to Carvajal, that was impossible. On the other hand, perhaps Carvajal was playing games within games, and what he really foresaw was a future in which Quinn didn't attend the Kuwaiti function. In that case the script might call for me to be the agent of change, the one who prevented Quinn from keeping his date, and then Carvajal would be counting on me to be just contrary enough to help things work out the right way. That didn't sound very plausible, but I had to take the possibility into account. I was lost in a maze of blind alleys. My sense of stochasticity would not hold. I no longer knew what I believed about the future or even the present, and the past itself was starting to look uncertain. I think that luncheon with Carvajal began the process of stripping me of what I once regarded as sanity.

I pondered for a couple of days. Then I went to Bob Lombroso's celebrated office and dumped the whole business on him.

"I have a problem of political tactics," I said.

"Why come to me instead of Haig Mardikian? He's the strategist."

"Because my problem involves concealing confidential information about Quinn. I know something that Quinn might want to know, and I'm not able to tell him. Mardikian's such a gung-ho Quinn man that he's likely to get the story

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out of me under a pledge of secrecy and then head straight to Quinn with it."

"I'm a gung-ho Quinn man too," Lombroso said. "*You're* a gung-ho Quinn man."

"Yes," I said. "But you're not so gung-ho that you'd breach a friend's confidence for Quinn's sake."

"Whereas you think Haig would?"

"He might."

"Haig would be upset if he knew you felt like that about him."

"I know you aren't going to report any of this to him," I said. "I *know* you aren't."

Lombroso made no reply, merely stood there against the magnificent backdrop of his collection of medieval treasures, digging his fingers deep into his dense black beard and studying me with those piercing eyes. There was a long worrisome silence. Yet I felt I had been right in coming to him rather than to Mardikian. Of the entire Quinn team Lombroso was the most reasonable, the most reliable, a splendidly sane, well-balanced man, centered and incorruptible, wholly independent of mind. If my judgment of him were wrong, I would be finished.

I said eventually, "Is it a deal? You won't repeat anything I tell you today?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"On whether I agree with you that it's best to conceal the thing you want concealed."

"I tell you, and then you decide?"

"Yes."

"I can't do that, Bob."

"That means you don't trust me either, right?"

I considered for a moment. Intuition said go ahead, tell him everything. Caution said there was at least a chance he might override me and take the story to Quinn.

"All right," I said. "I'll tell you the story. I hope that whatever I say remains between you and me."

"Go ahead," Lombroso said.

I took a deep breath. "I had lunch with Carvajal a few days ago. He told me that Quinn is going to make some wisecracks about Israel when he speaks at the Bank of Kuwait dedication early next month, and that the wisecracks are going to offend a lot of Jewish voters here, aggravating local Jewish disaffection with Quinn that I didn't know exists, but which Carvajal says is already severe and likely to get much worse."

Lombroso stared. "Are you out of your mind, Lew?"

"I might be. Why?"

"You really do believe that Carvajal can see the future?"

"He plays the stock market as though he can read next month's

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newspapers, Bob. He tipped us about Leydecker dying and Socorro taking over. He told us about Gilmartin. He —"

"Oil gellation too, yes. So he guesses well. I think we've already had this conversation at least once, Lew."

"He doesn't guess. I guess. He *sees.*"

Lombroso was trying to look patient and tolerant, but he seemed troubled. He is above all else a man of reason, and I was talking madness to him. "You think he can predict the content of an off-the-cuff speech that isn't due to be delivered for three weeks?"

"I do."

"How is such a thing possible?"

I thought of Carvajal's tablecloth diagram, of the two streams of time flowing in opposite directions. I couldn't try to sell that to Lombroso. I said, "I don't know. I don't know at all. I take it on faith. He's shown me enough evidence so that I'm convinced he can do it, Bob."

Lombroso looked unconvinced.

"This is the first I've heard that Quinn is in trouble with the Jewish voters," he said. "Where's the evidence for that? What do your polls show?"

"Nothing. Not yet."

"Not *yet?* When does it start to turn up?"

"In a few months, Bob. Carvajal says the *Times* will run a feature this fall on the way Quinn is losing Jewish support."

"Don't you think I'd know it pretty quickly if Quinn were getting in trouble with the Jews, Lew? But from everything I hear he's the most popular mayor with them since Beame, maybe since La Guardia."

"You're a millionaire. So are your friends," I told him. "You can't get a representative sampling of popular opinion hanging out with millionaires. You aren't even a representative Jew, Bob. You said so yourself: you're Sephardic, you're Latin, and Sephardim are an elite, a minority within a minority, an aristocratic little caste that has very little in common with Mrs. Goldstein and Mr. Rosenblum. Quinn might be losing the support of a hundred Rosenblums a day, and the news wouldn't reach your crowd of Spinozas and Cardozos until they read about it in the *Times.* Am I right?"

Shrugging, Lombroso said, "There's some truth in that. But we're getting off the track, aren't we? What's your actual problem, Lew?"

"I want to warn Quinn not to make that Kuwait speech, or else to lay off the wisecracks. Carvajal won't let me say a word to him."

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"Won't *let* you?"

"He says the speech is destined to occur as he perceived it, and he insists I simply let it take place. If I do anything to prevent Quinn from doing what the script calls for for that day, Carvajal threatens to sever relations with me."

Lombroso, looking perturbed and mournful, walked in slow circles around his office. "I don't know which is crazier," he said finally. "Believing that Carvajal can see the future, or fearing that he'll get even with you if you transmit his hunch to Quinn."

"It's not a hunch. It's a true vision."

"So you say."

"Bob, more than anything else, I want to see Paul Quinn go on to higher office in this country. I've got no right to hold back data from him, especially when I've found a unique source like Carvajal."

"Carvajal may be just —"

"I have complete faith in him!" I said, with a passion that surprised me, for until that moment I still had had lingering uncertainties about Carvajal's power, and now I was fully committed to its validity. "That's why I can't risk a break with him."

"So tell Quinn about the Kuwait speech, then. If Quinn doesn't deliver it, how will Carvajal know you're responsible?

"He'll know."

"We can announce that Quinn is ill. We can even check him into Bellevue for the day and give him a complete medical exam. We —"

"He'll know."

"We can hint to Quinn that he ought to go soft on any remarks that might be construed as anti-Israeli, then."

"Carvajal will know I did it," I said.

"He really has you by the throat, doesn't he?"

"I don't want to take the chance of spoiling things with him."

"Then don't. Let the Kuwaiti speech happen as scheduled, if you're so worried about offending Carvajal. A few wisecracks aren't going to do permanent damage are they?"

"They won't help any."

"They won't hurt that much. We've got two years before Quinn has to go before the voters again. He can make five pilgrimages to Tel Aviv in that time, if he has to." Lombroso came close and put his hand on my shoulder. This near, the force of his strong, vibrant personality was overwhelming. With great warmth and intensity he said, "Are you all right these days, Lew?"

"What do you mean?"

"You worry me. All this lunacy about seeing the future. And so much dither over one lousy speech. Maybe you need some rest. I know

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you've been under a great strain lately, and —"

"Strain?"

"Sundara," he said. "We don't need to pretend I don't know what's going on."

"I'm not happy about Sundara, no. But if you think my wife's pseudo-religious activities have affected my judgment, my mental balance, my ability to function as a member of the mayor's staff —"

"I'm only suggesting that you're very tired. Tired men find many things to worry about, not all of them real, and worrying makes them even more tired. Break the pattern, Lew. Skip off to Canada for a couple of weeks, say. A little hunting and fishing, and you'll be a new man. I have a friend who has an estate near Banff, a nice thousand-hectare spread up in the mountains, and —"

"Thanks, but I'm in better shape than you seem to think," I said. "I'm sorry I wasted your time this morning."

"Not at all a waste. It's important for us to share our difficulties, Lew. For all I know, Carvajal *does* see the future. But it's a hard notion for a rational man like me to swallow."

"Assume it's true. What do you advise?"

"Assuming it's true, I think you'd be wise not to do anything that could turn Carvajal off. Assuming it's true. Assuming it's true, it's in our best interests to milk him for further information, and therefore you ought not chance a break over something as minor as the consequences of this one speech."

I nodded. "I think so too. You won't drop any hints to Quinn, then, about what he ought to say or not to say at that bank dedication?"

"Of course not."

He began to usher me toward the door. I was shaky and sweating and, I imagine, wild-eyed.

I couldn't shut up, either. "And you won't tell people I'm cracking up, Bob? Because I'm not. I may be on the verge of a tremendous breakthrough in consciousness, but I'm not going crazy. I really am not going crazy," I said, so vehemently that it sounded unconvincing even to me.

"I do think you could use a short vacation. But, no, I won't spread any rumors of your impending commitment to the funny farm."

"Thanks, Bob."

"Thank you for coming to me."

"There was no one else."

"It'll work out," he said soothingly. "Don't worry about Quinn. I'll start checking to see if he really is getting in trouble with Mrs. Goldstein and Mr. Rosenblum. You might try some polltaking through your own

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department." He clasped my hand. "Get some rest, Lew. Get yourself some rest."

21.

And so I engineered the fulfilling of the prophecy, though it had been in my power to thwart it. Or had it been? I had declined to put Carvajal's ice-etched unbending determinism to the test. I had accomplished what they used to call a cop-out, when I was a boy. Quinn would speak at the dedication. Quinn would make his dumb jokes about Israel. Mrs. Goldstein would mutter; Mr. Rosenblum would curse. The mayor would acquire needless enemies; the *Times* would have a juicy story; we would set about the process of repairing the political damage; Carvajal would once more be vindicated. It would have been so easy to interfere, you say. Why not test the system? Call Carvajal's bluff. Well, I hadn't done it. I had had my chance, and I had been afraid to take it, as though in some secret way I knew the stars in their courses would come crashing into confusion if I meddled with the course of events. So I had surrendered to the alleged inevitability of it all with hardly a struggle. But had I really given in so easily? Had I ever been truly free to act? Was my surrender not also, perhaps, part of the unchangeable eternal script?

22.

Everyone has the gift, Carvajal said to me. *Very few know how to use it.* And he had talked of a time when I would be able to *see* things myself. Not if, but when.

The idea terrified and thrilled me. To look into the future, to be free of the buffeting of the random and the unexpected, to move beyond the vaporous imprecisions of the stochastic method into absolute certainty — oh, yes, yes, yes, how wondrous, but how frightening! To swing open that dark door, to peer down the track of time at the wonders and mysteries lying in wait —

A miner was leaving his home for his work
When he heard his little child scream
He went to the side of the little girl's bed
She said, Daddy, I've had such a dream

Frightening, because I knew I might *see* something I didn't want to see, and it might drain and shatter me as Carvajal apparently had been drained and shattered by knowledge of his death. Wondrous, because to *see* meant escape from

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the chaos of the unknown; it meant attainment at last of that fully structured, fully determined life toward which I had yearned since abandoning my adolescent nihilism for the philosophy of causality —

Please, daddy, don't go to the mines today
For dreams have so often come true
My daddy, my daddy, please don't go away
For I never could live without you.

But if Carvajal did indeed know some way of bringing the vision to life in me, I vowed I would handle it differently, not letting it make a shriveled recluse out of me, not bowing passively to the decrees of some invisible playwright, not accepting puppethood as Carvajal had done. No, I would use the gift in an active way, I would employ it to shape and direct the flow of history, I would take advantage of my special knowledge to guide and direct and alter, insofar as I was able, the pattern of human events.

Oh, I dreamed that the mines were all flaming with fire
And the men all fought for their lives
Just then the scene changed and the mouth of the mine
Was covered with sweethearts and wives.

According to Carvajal, such shaping and directing was impossible. Impossible for him, perhaps, but would I be bound by his limitations? Even if the future is fixed and unchangeable, knowledge of it could still be put to use to cushion blows, to redirect energies, to create new patterns out of the wreckage of the old. I would try. Teach me how to *see*, Carvajal, and let me try!

Oh, daddy, don't work in the mines today
For dreams have so often come true
My daddy, my daddy, please don't go away
For I never could live without you.

23.

Sundara vanished at the end of June, leaving no message, and was gone for five days. I didn't notify the police. When she returned, saying nothing by way of explanation, I didn't ask where she had been. Bombay again, Tierra del Fuego, Capetown, Bangkok, they were all the same to me. I was becoming a good Transit husband. Perhaps she had spent all five days spread-eagled on the altar at some

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local Transit house, if they have altars, or perhaps she'd been putting in time at a Bronx bordello. Didn't know, didn't want to care. We were badly out of touch with one another now, skating side by side over thin ice and never once glancing toward one another, never once exchanging a word, just gliding on silently toward an unknown and perilous destination. Transit processes occupied her energies night and day, day and night. "What do you get out of it?" I wanted to ask her. "What does it *mean* to you?" But I didn't. One sticky July evening she came home late from doing God knows what in the city, wearing a sheer turquoise sari that clung to her moist skin with a lasciviousness that would get her a ten-year sentence for public lewdity in puritan New Delhi, and came up to me and rested her arms on my shoulders and leaned close to me, so that I felt the warmth of her body and it made me tremble, and her eyes met mine, and there was in her dark shining eyes a look of pain and loss and regret, a terrible look of aching grief. And as though I were able to read her thoughts, I could clearly hear her telling me, "Say the word, Lew, only say the word, and I'll quit them, and everything will be as it used to be for us." I know that was what her eyes were telling me. But I didn't say the word. Why did I remain silent? Because I suspected Sundara was merely playing out another meaningless Transit exercise on me, playing a game of did-you-think-I-meant-it? Or because somewhere within me I really didn't want her to swerve from the course she had chosen?

24.

Quinn sent for me. It was the day before the ceremony at the Bank of Kuwait building.

He was standing in the middle of his office when I entered. The room was drab, drearily functional, nothing at all like Lombroso's awesome sanctum — dark awkward municipal furniture, portraits of former mayors — but today it had an eerie shimmer of brightness. Sunlight streaming through the window behind Quinn cloaked him in a dazzling golden nimbus, and he seemed to radiate strength and authority and purpose, emitting a flood of light more intense than that he was receiving. A year and a half as New York's mayor had left an imprint on him: the network of fine lines around his eyes was deeper than it had been on inaugural day; the blond hair had lost some of its sheen; his massive shoulders seemed to hunch a little, as if he were sagging under an impossible weight. But

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all that was gone from him now. The old Quinn vigor had returned. His presence filled the room.

He said, "Remember, about a month ago, you told me new patterns were shaping up and you'd be able to give me a forecast soon for the year ahead?"

"Sure. But I —"

"Wait. New factors have been shaping up, but you don't have access to all of them yet. I want to give them to you so you can work them into your synthesis, Lew."

"What sort of factors?"

"My plans for running for President."

After a long gawky pause I managed to say, "You mean running next year?"

"I don't stand a snowball's chance for next year," Quinn replied evenly. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes, but —"

"No buts. The ticket for 2000 is Kane and Socorro. I don't need your skill at projection to realize that. They have enough delegates in their pockets now for a first-ballot nomination. Then they'll go up against Mortonson a year from November and get clobbered. I figure Mortonson's going to rack up the biggest landslide since Nixon in '72, no matter who runs against him."

"I think so too."

Quinn said, "Therefore I'm talking about '04. Mortonson won't be able to run for another term and the Republicans have nobody else of his stature. Whoever grabs the New Democratic nomination that year is going to be President, right?"

"Right, Paul."

"Kane won't get a second chance. Landslide losers never do. Who else is there? Keats? He'll be past 60. Pownell? No staying power. He'll be forgotten. Randolph? I can't see him as anything better than somebody's vice-presidential pick."

"Socorro will still be around," I pointed out.

"Socorro, yes. If he plays his cards right during next year's campaign, he'll come out looking good no matter how badly the ticket is beaten. The way Muskie did, losing in '68, and Shriver, losing in '72. Socorro's been very much on my mind all this summer, Lew. I've been watching him move up like a rocket ever since Leydecker died. That's why I've decided to stop being coy and start my push for the nomination this early. I've got to head off Socorro. Because if he gets the nomination in '04, he's going to win, and if he wins he'll be a two-term President, and that puts me on the sidelines until the year 2012." He gave me a dose of the classic Quinn eye-contact, transfixing me until I

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wanted to squirm. "I'll be 51 years old in 2012, Lew. I don't want to have to wait that long. A potential candidate can get awfully withered if he dangles on the vine a dozen years waiting his turn. What do you think?"

"I think your projection checks out all the way," I said.

Quinn nodded. "Okay. This is the timetable that Haig and I have been working out the past couple of days. We spend the rest of '99 and the first half of next year simply laying the substructure. I make some speeches around the country, I get to know the big party leaders better. I become friendly with a lot of precinct-house small fry who are *going* to be big party leaders by the time 2004 comes around. Next year, after Kane and Socorro are nominated, I campaign nationwide for them, with special emphasis on the Northeast. I do my damndest to deliver New York State for them. What the hell, I figure they'll take six or seven of the big industrial states anyway, and they might as well have mine, if I'm going to come on like a dynamic party leader; Mortonson will still wipe them out in the South and the farm belt. In 2001 I lay low and concentrate on getting re-elected mayor, but once that's behind me I resume national speechmaking, and after the 2002 Congressional elections I announce my candidacy. That gives me all of '03 and half of '04 to sew up the delegates, and by the time the primaries come around I'll be sure of the nomination. Well?"

"I like it, Paul. I like it a lot."

"Good. You're going to be my key man. I want you to concentrate full-time on isolating and projecting national political patterns, so you can draw up game-plans within the larger structure I've just outlined. Leave the little local stuff alone, the New York City crap. Mardikian can handle my re-election campaign without much help. You look for the big picture, you tell me what the people out in Ohio and Hawaii and Nebraska think they want, you tell me what they're likely to want four years from now. You're going to be the man who'll make me President, Lew."

"Damned right I will," I said.

"You're going to be the eyes that see into the future for me."

"You know it, man."

We slapped palms. "Onward to 2004!" he yelled.

"Washington, here we come!" I bellowed.

It was a silly moment, but it was touching, too. History on the hoof, marching toward the White House, me in the vanguard carrying the flag and playing the drums. I was so swept by emotion that I almost started to tell Quinn to pass up the Bank of Kuwait

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ceremony. But then I thought I saw Carvajal's sad-eyed face hovering in the dust motes of that beam of light pouring through the mayor's window, and I caught myself. So I said nothing, and Quinn went and made his speech, and of course he jammed his foot deep into his epiglottis with a couple of elephantine quips about the Near Eastern political situation. ("I hear that last week King Abdullah and Premier Eleazar were playing poker down at the casino in Eilat, and the king bet three camels and an oil well and the premier raised him five hogs and a submarine, so the king ...." Oh, no, it's too dumb to repeat.) Naturally Quinn's performance made every network that night, and the next day City Hall was inundated by angry telegrams. Mardikian phoned me the place was being picketed by B'nai B'rith, the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Defense League, and the whole House of David starting team. I went over there, slinking goyishly through the mob of outraged Hebrews and wanting to apologize to the entire cosmos for having by my silence permitted all this to happen. Lombroso was there with the mayor. We exchanged glances. I felt triumphant — had Carvajal not predicted the incident perfectly? — and sheepish, and frightened, too. Lombroso gave me a quick wink, which could have meant any one of a dozen things, but which I took to be a token of reassurance and forgiveness.

Quinn didn't look perturbed. He tapped the huge box of telegrams smartly with his toe and said in a wry voice, "And thus we commence our pursuit of the American voter. We aren't off to much of a start, are we, lad?"

"Don't worry," I told him, Boy Scout fervor creeping into my voice. "This is the last time anything of this sort is going to happen."

25.

I phoned Carvajal. "I have to talk to you," I said.

We met along the Hudson Promenade near 10th Street. The weather was ominous, dark and moist and warm, the sky a threatening greenish-yellow, with black-edged thunderheads piled high over New Jersey and a sense of impending apocalypse pervading everything. Shafts of fierce off-color sunlight, more gray-blue than gold, burned through a filtering layer of murky clouds clustered like a crumpled blanket in midsky. Preposterous weather, operatic weather, a noisy overstated backdrop for our conversation.

Carvajal's eyes had an un-

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natural gleam. He looked taller, younger, jazzing along the promenade on the balls of his feet. Why did he seem to gain strength between each of our meetings?

"Well?" he demanded.

"I want to be able to *see*."

"*See*, then. I'm not stopping you, am I?"

"Be serious," I begged.

"I always am. How can I help you?"

"Teach me to do it."

"Did I ever tell you it could be taught?"

"You said everyone has the gift but very few know how to use it. All right. Show me how to use it."

"Using it can perhaps be learned," Carvajal said, "but it can't be taught."

"Please."

"Why so eager?"

"Quinn needs me," I told him abjectly. "I want to help him. To become President."

"So?"

"I want to help him. I need to *see*."

"But you can project trends so well, Lew!"

"Not enough. Not enough."

Thunder boomed over Hoboken. A cold damp wind out of the west stirred the clotted clouds. Nature's scene-setting was becoming grotesquely, comically, excessive.

Carvajal said, "Suppose I told you to give me complete control over your life. Suppose I asked you to let me make every decision for you, to shape all your actions to my orders, to put your existence entirely into my hands, and I said that if you did that, there'd be a chance that you'd learn how to *see*. A chance. What would your reply be?"

"I'd say that it's a deal."

"*Seeing* may not be as wonderful as you think it is, you know. Right now you look upon it as the magic key to everything. What if it turns out to be nothing but a burden and an obstacle? What if it's a curse?"

"I don't think it will be."

"How can you know?"

"A power like that can be a tremendous positive force. I can't see it as anything but beneficial for me. I can see its potential negative side, sure, but still — a curse? No."

"What if it is?"

I shrugged. "I'll take that risk. Has it been a curse for you?"

Carvajal paused and looked up at me, eyes searching mine. This was the appropriate moment for lightning to crackle across the heavens, for drumrolls of terrible thunder to sound up and down the Hudson, for tempestuous rain to slash across the Promenade. None of that happened. Absurdly, the clouds directly overhead parted

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and sweet soft yellow sunlight enveloped the dark storm frowns. So much for nature as a setter of scene.

"Yes," Carvajal said quietly. "A curse. If anything, yes, a curse, a curse."

"I don't believe you."

"What does that matter to me?"

"Even if it's been a curse for you, I don't think it would for me."

"Very courageous, Lew. Or very foolish."

"Both. Nevertheless, I want to be able to *see*."

"Are you willing to become my disciple?"

Strange, jarring word. "What would that involve?"

"I've already told you. You give yourself to me, on a no-questions-asked, no - results - guaranteed basis.

"How will that help me to *see?*"

"No questions asked," he said. "Just give yourself to me, Lew."

"Done."

The lightning came. The skies opened and a crazy drenching downpour battered us with implausible fury.

(*conclusion next month*)

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Dr. Aandahl's five page quick weight loss diet, a real chiller, and *not* to be read at the dinner table . . .

Sylvester's Revenge

by VANCE AANDAHL

Sylvester was dying. At 800 pounds he'd lost the ability to walk. He couldn't even sit up at 1200. Now he weighed 2000. An immense hunk of trapped and breathless blubber, naked except for an old blanket tossed across his sperm-whale hips, he lay flat on his back both day and night, his only movement an occasional roll to one side or the other. He hated himself, and now he wept as Dr. Fletcher held the mirror overhead and made him comb his hair.

He was resting in a deep eight-by-six foot tile tub located in one corner of her basement laboratory. The tub was equipped with faucet and drain, and now, just as she did every morning after she'd make him comb his hiar, Dr. Fletcher attached a shower hose to wash away his excrement.

"Stinko, stinko, honeybun!" she laughed. "Stinko, stinko, *stinko*, stinko!"

Then she squirted him with cold water till the tears poured from his eyes and he moaned desperately for her to stop. Abruptly she turned off the faucet and left him shivering and chattering, alone and naked and terrified.

And he was dying. He could feel his heart groaning under its burden. How much longer would the little pumper last? Another month? Or was it already just a matter of days?

If only Dr. Fletcher would abandon her experiment, it might not be too late for a starvation diet to save his life. He'd begged her and begged her, but she was completely crazy now, and he was helpless — absolutely helpless. He weighed a cool short ton, and it held him down like a giant hand. He was pinned. Sylvester forced a tiny groan from his tortured, constricted lungs.

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"What would you like for your eight o'clock feeding, honeybun?"

Just as her mind had dissolved completely in recent months, so too had her voice grown strange, half lilt and half whine; and though he couldn't see anything through his pig-squint eyes except the tops of three walls and nearly all of the dull olive ceiling, he knew by the sound's direction that she must be sitting down at her desk, probably to extract a few more milliliters of lowenicillin from the mourning cloak butterflies she'd collected last night. He waited till he heard the click of her instruments (he knew she was pinning the butterflies one by one to a board), then answered her, laboring for each word.

"Dr. Fletcher, please, I don't want to eat any more."

"Nonsense, punkins. Your next feeding's at eight."

"I know. But I'm too fat. It's killing me."

"Oh, poopsie, you know you need to eat. A body like yours requires 15,000 calories a day."

"But ..."

Suddenly she appeared at the rim of the tub, leaned over, waggled her finger at him and clucked her tongue. "Poopsie — you know you're going to have your eight o'clock feeding whether you like it or not."

Sylvester hated that word feeding. Why couldn't she call it a meal? But there was no sense in arguing.

Eight months ago she'd seemed the soul of cool scientific reason. A noted biochemist at the University's Craigjacker Research Center, she'd hired him to serve as the first human subject in her obesity experiments. She'd explained that he would have to spend three months under constant observation at a secluded military laboratory, some thirty miles south of Elko, Nevada, that he would find the daily injections of lowenicillin somewhat painful, and that he might gain as much as 130 pounds during the course of the experiment. Maybe that's why she'd been having trouble finding a subject, and why she was now willing to pay Sylvester $8,500 — more than enough to cover his expenses for the next two years while he finished his dissertation on the evolution of the Petrarchan sonnet. She'd also promised him all the Budweiser he could drink. So what the hell — Sylvester already weighed 260 pounds, and he'd figured that growing a little fatter at the wages Dr. Fletcher was offering sure beat teaching freshman comp for $800 a quarter.

In early June Sylvester had flown to Elko with Dr. Fletcher, then ridden with her in a rented Toyota to a World War II Army

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base which had seemed completely deserted except for an occasional jack rabbit and thousands — no, millions — of mourning cloaks perched on every branch and roof, dark-winged nymphs that had fluttered up like smoke wherever they'd walked. When Sylvester had seen that Dr. Fletcher's "military laboratory" was in fact a laundry room in the basement of a half-fallen barracks, when he'd seen the tub and the rig of lights and tubes and needles suspended over it, he'd known he'd made a big mistake. He'd told her to wait for a minute, that he'd left his glasses in the car. She'd shrugged and told him to hurry back; but when he'd turned to walk back to the Toyota to make his escape, something hard and black had dropped through his head, and when he'd awakened, he'd found himself chained to the bottom of the tub.

Now, eight months later in cold February, the chains were gone. His own weight held him prisoner.

He caught an acrid whiff of lowenicillin and blinked his eyes. Once again she was hovering overhead.

"Time for your medicine, dumpling! Try to be a big boy."

Sylvester gritted his teeth and closed his eyes. He knew what was coming. A second later he felt the big needle plunge into his stomach — right through the diaphragm, like a rabies shot — and he screeched as the pain overwhelmed him. For a long instant of agony it seemed unendurable; then the lowenicillin reached his brain, and he fell spinning and nauseous through the dark chambers of his mind. He seemed to be floating in a black void, the vacuum of outer space. A huge slice of cherry cheesecake glided by like an asteroid. Suddenly he was surrounded by enormous portions of every imaginable delicacy — crackling rib-eye roasts, fluffy lemon meringue pies, peppery guacamole salads. Then he fell again, fell through the dark into a huge steaming vat of mashed bananas, calf brains, spaghetti drenched in melted lard, and tapioca pudding. Clinging to a boiled potato, he tried to keep from sinking, but the glop sucked him down like quicksand. He screamed and went under; he was suffocating in food, his nose filling with thick rancid gravy as he struggled not to breathe. He pushed away, swam deeper, deeper. He had to grope down, down to his childhood. There he stood alone, always alone, alone at the edge of play, a book of poems clutched in one hand, a chocolate bar in the other. His classmates ran. They skipped and jumped and bounded, they turned cartwheels, they even seemed to soar and glide like

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butterflies, their lean bodies whistling through the wind, their skinny arms and legs flapping up and down. They passed him in a breeze, then they were gone. He stood alone, choking in the un-kicked cloud of playground gravel. He had to run, had to catch them. Putting his head down and clenching his fists, he lumbered into a slow waddle. Their voices came drifting back to taunt him:

"Fatty, fatty, two by four, couldn't get through the kitchen door! Fatty, fatty! Fatty, fatty!"

He tried to lift his feet higher, but the gravity of his bulk held him back like a giant hand. Then he couldn't run at all, couldn't walk, couldn't even move ...

"It's almost time for your eight o'clock feeding, honeybun."

He lifted his head and slowly shook away the lowenicillin dream. The hallucinations that inevitably followed an injection of the obesity drug always overwhelmed him, but they rarely lasted more than a few minutes. As his eyes began to focus, he saw her overhead.

"Guess what's cooking! It's one of your favorites, sweetheart — tapioca pudding. Lots and lots, too!"

He waited till her footsteps disappeared into the barracks kitchen, then tried futilely to squeeze his sausage-fingers into fists. Tapioca was the worst. She wouldn't even let it cool before jamming the wide aluminum funnel into his mouth and pouring it down, cup after cup, quart after quart.

Once, about a month ago, Sylvester had tried a little rebellion: he'd locked his teeth, refusing to let her insert the funnel. Dr. Fletcher had frowned and tapped his incisors. Then she'd lifted the funnel and hacked down hard, gouging his gums. The pain had roared through his body, even through his rolling, nearly nerveless fat. He'd screamed. Then, whimpering, he'd opened wide. Mingling with the salt of his own blood, the first disgusting cupful of tapioca had slid down his throat like a gobbet of frog eggs.

"Chow time!"

He shuddered at the shrill of her voice.

"Ready or not, here it comes!"

He could hear the serving cart creaking closer under its heavy load, a two-gallon iron vat full to the brim.

"No, please, no ..."

She leaned over him and scowled. As always, her skeletal face terrified him. The grayish yellow skin stretching from her pointed cheekbones to the jut of her jaw was scraped raw where her nails had been a-picking. She had no lips at all, only a thin fleshless slit. Her nose was a sharp hook,

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her eyes black holes. The tiny mourning cloak tattooed just above her left eyebrow seemed to glow like a preternatural death's-head, and her hair hung down in thin washed-out strands.

"Oh, poopsie, I was really hoping you wouldn't be a problem eater today! Why do you have to be such a big baby?"

As he raged against his bonds of lard, a searing fire suddenly exploded in his chest. Black waves rolled through his neck into his head, rolled up against the buzzing panic in his mind, pulling and pulling till only one thin beam of light still wavered in his brain and kept him from total darkness.

At last the pain eased and the black tide rolled back.

Did she know he was dying? He could feel the blood muscle flopping in his chest, slowing, fluttering like a powered wing, slowing again, beating its last feeble beats.

Moaning, he opened his mouth.

The cold aluminum touched his tongue, then probed deeper.

Bitterness flooded him. Why should he die like this? He wanted to do something forbidden, something wrong and perverse. He wanted to hurt her.

So when the first horrid glop of tapioca hit his throat, he blew it back.

It sprayed into her astonished face and stuck there, clinging to the drawn gray skin in steaming yellow beads. At the same instant he felt his heart rupture.

"YOU BAD BABY!" she howled, trying to tub the hot tapioca out of her eyes. Then her face seemed to blacken. Was it fury, he wondered, or just the fading of the light? Her screwed-up fists were pummeling his face — distant and trivial, like the summer rain on a patio roof — and even farther away, so faint he couldn't be sure, his stomach felt the bony sprawl of her elbows and knees. She'd jumped onto him.

It was then that inspiration came to Sylvester. He would begin his one movement — the long, certain roll.

Dr. Fletcher screeched and tried to clamber free, but too late: he'd already caught her between his belly and the side of the tub. He could feel his ton of blubber pressing her deeper and deeper, crushing her gaunt frame under great layers of suffocating fat. Then, a moment later, he was past caring, past enjoying the muffled shrieks beneath him.

And she was pinned ....

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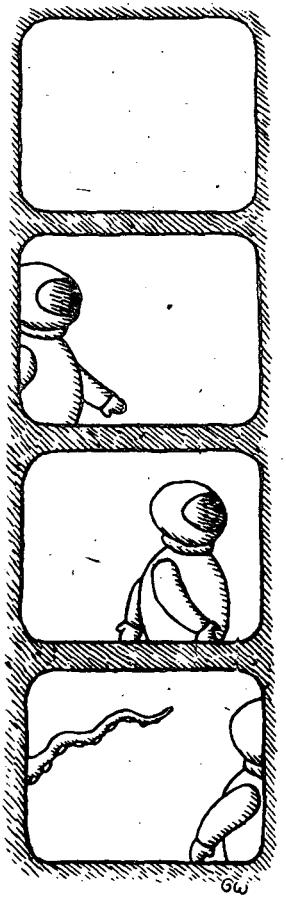
FRANKENSTEIN
RE-RE-REDUX

As you can see from the number of "re"s in the above title, this is the third major Frankenstein spin-off I've had to talk about in less than a year. And while this one is a goody, I sincerely hope they lay the poor Creature to rest for a while; even such a prodigious constitution as his can be overworked.

This seems to have been a Frankenstein-oriented month for me, as a matter of fact. The TV version co-scripted by Christopher Isherwood was rebroadcast — it occasioned the first of the *redux* titles — and I watched it again with considerable pleasure. Then I got around to reading the novel for the first time, something I'd avoided doing through a deep distrust of 19th century literature brought on by too much William Morris, an author whom I like a great deal better in theory than in practice. I found it to be a remarkable work, not only fully deserving of Brian Aldiss' nomination as the first major novel of sf, but also terrifying in a very different way from the various film adaptations. This because the Creature does not fully appear for some time after his creation, but lurks on the periphery of Victor's life, materializing to

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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strike out and then vanishing again. In addition, the first paragraph of Mrs. Shelley's first introduction to the work (there were two) is a succinct guide to the writing of science fiction which has yet to be outdated.

The second *redux* piece was on the Andy Warhol-Paul Morrisey version, and I made the point that for a work to be subjected to this kind of major burlesque, it has indeed entered the mythology of a culture — in this case, it is the *film* rather than the novel that has become the best known version and the basis for the myth upon which the variations are spun. That particular variation failed for me simply because it tried to be funny (among other things) and wasn't.

On the other hand, humor is one of those things I'm dubious about, particularly as to my own taste in it. With the exception of Monty Python's Flying Circus and Carol Burnett (but only in association with Tim Conway), nothing has made me laugh for years — since stand-up comedians and topical humor came into vogue, as a matter of fact. I like my humor, like literature and fashions, to be fantastic, and there hasn't been much in that line. But I've taken heart a bit — I laughed like a fool at Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*. It's a very funny movie.

This review will have to be oblique. The problem with very funny movies is the almost irresistible urge to tell you readers about the funniness, thereby doing a great job of spoiling it. Nobly resisting this temptation, I can only, like the Creature in the novel, lurk around the periphery.

Brooks' take-off point really is not the novel itself (though due credit is given to Mrs. Shelley) but the series of B-films which followed the original in the '30s and '40s. Here is the Frankenstein descendant — a famous American surgeon — blundering back to the old castle and starting things all over again at the instigation of the sinister housekeeper. Every obligatory scene is included: the lightning-energized lab (one gathers from a credit that it's the apparatus from the original film), the encounter with the little girl, the visit to the blind hermit, the mob of peasants storming out of the village waving whatever those things are that they're always waving, the monster walking through the mists with the diaphanously clad maiden in his arms (in this case, she's wearing mules with pom-poms, too, a just-right touch). Need I say that each of these scenes doesn't result in the usual?

It's not just the immediate gags that make this work so well,

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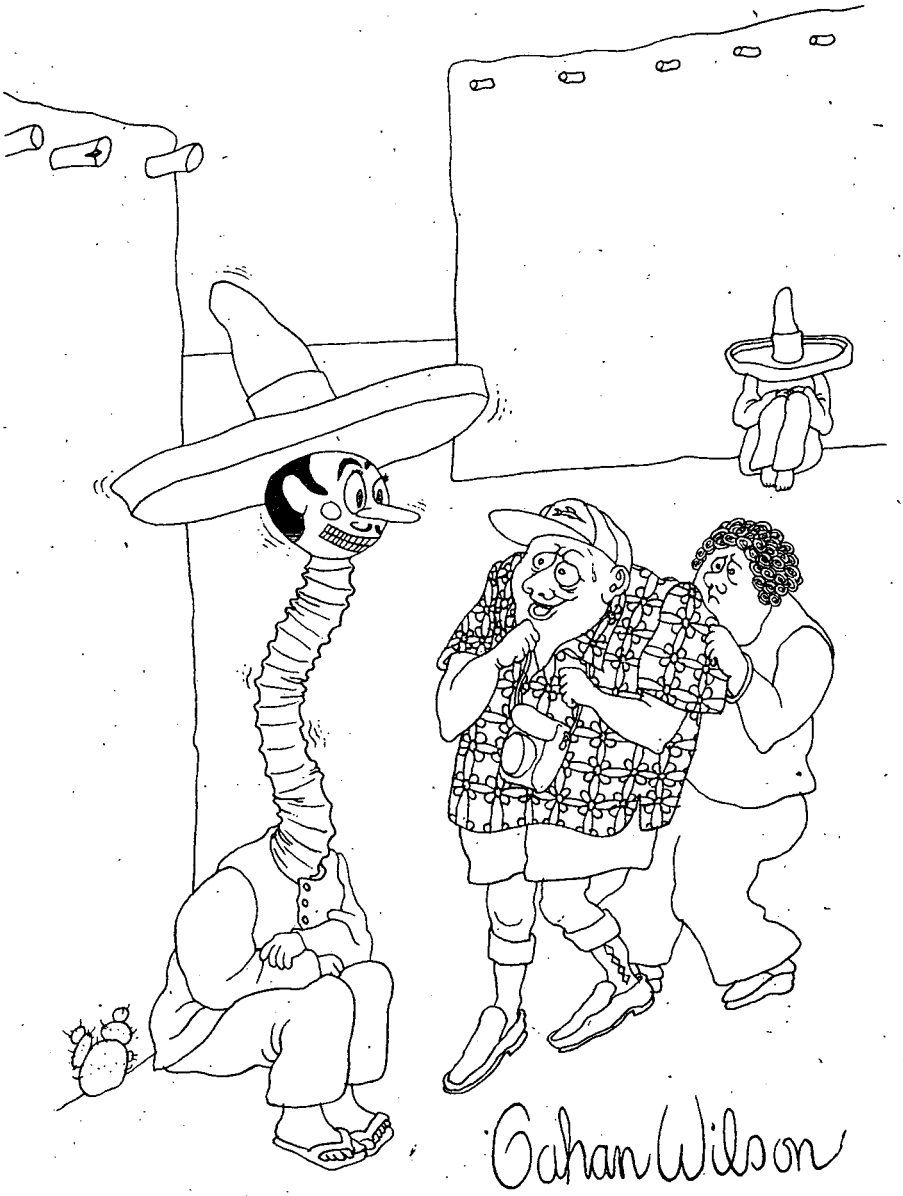

"Really gave me a turn!"

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Our readers happily do worry about such things as what *was* Sherlock Holmes up to during the Martian invasion as depicted by H. G. Wells, and so the Wellmans' earlier two stories about this very same matter were received gratefully ("The Adventure of the Martian Client," Dec. 1969, "Venus, Mars, and Baker Street," March 1972). Here is a third and final account, which should set the record straight once and for all.

Sherlock Holmes Versus Mars

by MANLY W. WELLMAN and WADE WELLMAN

(Editor's Note: H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* is admittedly the longest and most widely read published account of the invasion from Mars; yet it is far from definitive, and two recent articles by Dr. John H. Watson have charged it with inaccuracies and omissions. Since the retirement of Mr. Sherlock Holmes to Sussex, the subjoined account by an anonymous writer has been submitted. It purports to be based on private writings and verbal statements by Holmes who, though refusing to discuss it, has not forbidden its publication.)

By evening of that June Friday, a curious, chattering throng milled around the craterlike pit in which the first invading cylinder had unscrewed to release its bizarre passengers. On the 6 o'clock train from London arrived Sir Percy Phelps of the Foreign Office, with a tall stranger in grey. Several of the crowd spoke to Sir Percy and gazed at his hawk-faced companion, whose dark, alert eyes swept over the scene.

"Let's not join those around the pit," he said to Sir Percy. "Here, we can watch from behind this sandy rise and make deductions."

A bicyclist, pausing, told of seeing the creatures of the cylinder. "Like an octupus," he described them, and another added, "More like a spider." The tall man wrote swiftly on a note pad. Ogilvy, from the nearby college observatory, joined them and Sir Percy introduced his companion.

"Has Professor Challenger been here?" the tall one asked Ogilvy. "His wife said he had come. A short, heavy man with a black beard."

"George E. Challenger, the zoologist? Yes, he was here," said

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Ogilvy. "Suggested these visitors might not be Martians, and took offense when Stent, the Astronomer Royal, insisted that those flashes from Mars prove they are. Ten flashes, on successive midnights, which means nine more cylinders. Challenger spoke rebukingly to Stent and went away. But you, gentlemen, will you join our delegation to communicate with these Martians?"

"Delegation?" repeated Phelps. "Why, as I'm with the government—"

"An excellent reason for you to stay apart," broke in his companion. "Reflect, Sir Percy, these scientists will confer, if conferring is possible. Thank you, Mr. Ogilvy, we won't join your dangerous experiment."

Twilight lowered as the crowd fell back from the pit on all sides. The deputation advanced, headed by Stent and Ogilvy, with the journalist Henderson carrying a white flag on a pole.

"They will know that we come in peace," said Phelps from the mound.

"I wonder," said the other. "Those descriptions suggest a race vastly different from ourselves. To them a white flag might be meaningless. And creatures who can travel from Mars to Earth cannot, I think, have any great respect for mankind."

From the pit rose the domelike metal hunch of the first fighting-machine to be used against Earth. At its top moved a cowled superstructure. The two observers saw a spurt of green vapor and a sudden brilliant flash of light. A droning wail of sound, and the men of the delegation bust into flame, staggered and writhed, then fell motionless.

Another flash, rather than a visible beam, swept through the watching groups, ignited trees and more distant houses. Phelps cried out and turned to run, but his companion dragged him down behind the rise. The flash passed over them, struck others less fortunate or less quick, and abruptly ceased. Stars twinkled out in an evening sky tinged faintly with green. Among the blazing trees there was headlong flight, by all but the two in the low ground behind the rise.

The tall stranger rose cautiously and peered towards the pit. A mirrorlike thing hung there on a mast. He dropped down again.

"Move away at a crouch," he told Phelps. "Here, where the ground is low. Don't give them a chance at you."

He led the trembling Phelps to better cover, and away beyond to Briarbrae, Phelps's beautiful home in Woking. They conferred earnestly in the study. From time to time,

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servants were sent running with telegrams to London.

Troops arrived during the night and took positions encircling the pit at what was judged a safe distance. Word came of another cylinder landing at nearby Byfleet. At dawn of Saturday, Phelps and his friend were at the Woking station to catch the first train to London. Phelps spoke authoritatively to the postmaster.

"More troops will be here, with trained observers," he said. "Information will be wired to my office by Brigadier General Waring or his staff members. Here are my private orders: Any message for me is to be sent in duplicate to this friend of mine."

"Don't I know him, Sir Percy?" asked the postmaster. "Didn't he visit you, back in '88?"

"Yes, he helped me in a confidential matter about the Italian Naval Treaty. This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, of 221-b Baker Street, London."

Holmes was in Baker Street by 7 A.M. He mounted the seventeen steps to 221-b, but did not seek his own flat. He touched the bell above the doorplate that read MRS. HUDSON, and his blonde, rosy-cheeked landlady opened to him, smiling.

"Did Watson come home?" asked Holmes.

"A special delivery came last night. He can't leave his poor sick servant Murray for several days."

"That's what I wanted to know."

Holmes stepped in and closed the door. They kissed, holding each other close, her rich curves pressed to his sinewy leanness. "My dearest," she whispered, "I've always loved you."

"Not quite always," he amended, smiling. "Not until we met at Donnithorpe, where I was an undergraduate beginning to solve crimes and you were a poor, pretty, troubled girl."

"You solved my troubles, set me free from Morse Hudson. You helped me find this place, then came to lodge here." She released him and drew back. "Have you had breakfast?"

"A cup of coffee."

"You never look after yourself."

She lifted a silver cover from a chafing dish. "Curried chicken," said Holmes happily as he sat down. "Martha, you have as sound a notion of breakfast as a Scotchwoman."

He ate with good appetite, telling of last night's events on Horsell Common.

"How fortunate for Sir Percy that you were there," said Martha. "Only you could have thought fast enough to rescue him. But your

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mind always moves with such magnificent speed."

"I won't tell Watson I was there," said Holmes. "Sometimes he embarrasses me with his flattery. You never embarrass me, because I love you."

Her blue eyes widened. "How did these Martians come here?"

"The papers told us that. Midnight after midnight, a flash from Mars, ten in all. Each flash put a cylinder into space. The third will arrive tonight."

Her hands clasped in admiration. "You are so well informed. Dr. Watson once wrote that you knew nothing of astronomy."

"I told him that for a joke, but I try to learn something of everything. Lately I reread Moriarty's *Dynamics of an Asteroid*, and found new stimulation." He put down his fork and rose. "Just as I'm always stimulated by your cooking. Thank you, my dear."

He went to his own quarters. A letter was stuck in the door. He opened it and read quickly:

My Dear Holmes,

I rush you this by special delivery. As you doubtless realize, nobody reflects that these invaders of Earth have come with aggressive purpose. Please stay away from Woking. I might be killed, and mankind would need your intelligence — not greatly inferior to mine — to meet this danger.

Yours, truly,
George Edward Challenger

As Holmes put the letter down, a messenger knocked with a telegram:

MARTIANS OBSERVED FROM SAFE POSITIONS WILL OPEN FIRE AT FIRST HOSTILE MOVE
BRIG GEN SIR PRETHERIC WARING KCB

Through the open window drifted the cry of a newsboy. Holmes hurried down to buy a paper. STRANGE REPORT FROM WOKING, said the headline, with a garbled account of things he already knew. He sat and wrote quickly:

My Dear Challenger,

I went to Woking Friday before receiving your letter, but did not find you. Descriptions of Martians tally with what we observed in that Crystal Egg we have both studied. Like you, I was prepared for hostility, and this weapon people begin to call the Heat-Ray is disaster to face. Nor do we

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know as yet what more terrible armament they undoubtedly have.

I suggest that these are pioneers, an expedition to be followed by a mass migration when Earth and Mars are again in opposition. Doubtless they regard us as lower animals, to be destroyed as pests or possibly to be exploited in some way.

Keep the Crystal safe. Its obvious property of interplanetary communication may be unusual enough to cause the Invaders to try to recapture it. What if we could trap one in the attempt and experiment — perhaps inject him with earthly germs, such as his system does not know and resist?

With warm regards,
Sherlock Holmes

He rang for Billy, the page boy, and told him to send the letter to West Kensington by special messenger.

"What about these Martian things, sir?" asked Billy. "The paper says they can't get out of that pit."

"Forget that report, Billy," said Holmes. "If they could travel from Mars to Earth, they can travel and fight here. Where do your parents live?"

"Why, they retired to Yorkshire a year ago."

"Here, my boy." Holmes held out two pound notes. "After sending that letter, take a holiday to visit them. Things may be disrupted for a time, here in town."

He spent the rest of the morning and all of the afternoon reflecting carefully on the information he had received, making notes as thoughts occurred to him. He barely touched the light lunch Martha brought him. Several excited callers brought news of Military preparations in Surrey, but no reports of any fighting. Holmes thought briefly of wiring to advise shelling the pits before the Martians emerged, but did not. Military men always dismissed civilian advice with contempt.

That evening, Martha fetched in a veal and ham pie and a fruit compote for dinner. "You're troubled," she ventured as he opened a bottle of Burgundy.

"Accurately deduced. A terrible fate threatens Surrey. I have a special affection for that county—it was there I solved a puzzle at Reigate and explained a mystery at Wisteria Lodge, besides helping Phelps recover the Naval Treaty. But, bad as things are in Surrey, they may be worse here."

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She ate slowly. "The people on the street don't seem frightened."

"Their minds don't grasp implications. I wish I could talk to Challenger. Yes, or to Watson."

She smiled at that. "You've always rallied him when he didn't follow your reasoning."

"Yes, but his mind is scientific, and he has often proved his bravery and loyalty. Now I must go to the telegraph office, but we will spend an evening together."

That night, and Sunday morning while church bells rang, Holmes interviewed refugees from Surrey. Shakily they told of troops wiped out by flashing reflector devices and of swift, gigantic machines on the move. By Sunday noon, Holmes gathered that whole towns had been effortlessly destroyed and that military forces, horse, foot and artillery, had proved helpless against the fighting-machines. Back in his sitting room Sunday afternoon, he made two copies of all he had learned and of his own estimate of the situation.

"No word from Challenger or Watson," he said to Martha. "I will leave one copy of my notes here. It takes no great deductive mind to realize that this hopelessly one-sided war between worlds is aimed for London. The third cylinder fell in Surrey last night."

"How can London be taken?" she asked.

"You and I shan't be here to see. Pack some belongings, my dear. This morning I sent Billy on a holiday to Yorkshire, and you and I shall take our own up at Donnithorpe, where we haven't been for years. Your uncle is landlord of the inn there, and my old friend Trevor is justice of the peace, like his father before him."

Yet again he sought the post office, where he read more wire reports of Martians on the attack. Five, it seemed, came with each cylinder — fifteen thus far. One machine had been smashed with its pilot by artillery at Weybridge, though the batteries there had been wiped out by its comrades. The machines were described as boilerlike housings on nimble tripods, a hundred feet high, moving with the speed of an express train. After the Weybridge battle they had retreated, doubtless to reconnoiter before resuming the offensive.

Back home, he packed two valises and wrote a note to Watson. This he fixed, with a copy of his report, on the blade of a jacknife driven into the mantelpiece. A knock sounded, and he opened the door to Sir Percy Phelps.

"Come in, my dear fellow," Holmes said. "I'm on my way from town. The news from Surrey is disastrous, and I feel certain that a second Martian weapon — perhaps

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comparing to the Heat-Ray as a rifle compares to a pistol — is about to be unleashed."

"You mustn't leave," Phelps almost snapped. "Here, I've brought you an important secret commission."

He handed a paper to Holmes, who read it quickly. "This gives me sweeping powers and responsibilities," he said.

"The Government itself will go to Birmingham. We ask you, in the name of England — nay, in the name of humanity — to observe here, to see what, if anything can be done. You cannot leave."

"I have a pressing duty in Norfolk. What is my brother Mycroft doing in this matter?"

"He is going with the Royal Family to Balmoral in Scotland," replied Phelps. "No, Holmes, there is nobody better fitted, more worthy of this important and dangerous assignment than yourself."

Holmes gazed at him a moment. "I'll go to Norfolk, then come back. Let me telegraph you at Birmingham, and rely on me to return and do what I can here."

Out came Phelp's hand to clasp his.

When Holmes and Martha reached Donnithorpe shortly before midnight, the village inn was charged with an excitement that reminded Holmes of the day many years before when Hudson, the blackmailing seaman, and his scapegrace son Morse had fled the home of Squire Trevor, leaving their victim dying of a stroke. Martha's aunt and uncle welcomed her, asked questions about the invasion, and blinked uncomprehendingly at Holmes's replies. Holmes slept well in his upper room. At 9 o'clock Monday morning, Martha brought in a tray with bacon, scrambled eggs, toast and tea. As they ate, she gave him more news.

"The squire's called a meeting here to discuss the invasion," she said.

"My old university friend, Victor Trevor," said Holmes. "I've not seen him since he returned from the Indies to his family home. I must attend that meeting."

He found half a dozen grave-faced men in the inn parlor. Victor Travor introduced him to the rector of the church, the postmaster, a sturdy, black-bearded blacksmith, and other community leaders. At their request, Holmes told what he knew about the Martians but did not mention his government commission.

"We'll form a volunteer defense company," said Trevor. "Bring weapons — fowling pieces, sporting rifles. Meet war with war."

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The others applauded. "Well said, Squire, we're with you," said the blacksmith, but Holmes lifted a lean hand for silence.

"Gentlemen, the army has tried to fight and was utterly routed," he reminded. "The Invaders quickly saw how we gave battle and brought all resistance to nothing. Their Heat-Ray wipes out whole crowds at a flash, destroys houses and guns like straw. I've heard reports of another weapon, a sort of Black Smoke that smothers any living thing. To assemble against them is suicidal."

"Then how to deal with them?" Trevor demanded.

"As of now, I advise scattering before an advance. But they are not here yet, and I hope for more information. Meanwhile, why not gather supplies in homes and keep a close watch to southward?"

"Excellent!" cried Trevor. "We'll do as you say."

"Telegrams for Mr. Holmes," called a voice from the front hall.

Holmes took the messages to his room. They were in a cipher Phelps had not given him, but he puzzled it out fairly quickly. The reports spoke of widespread panic in London as the Invaders had come their devastating way up the Surrey side of the Thames. Military opposition had utterly collapsed. Great stretches of lower lands were flooded with the Black Smoke. Nobody could estimate the number of dead. A fourth cylinder had landed in Surrey.

Holmes pondered. Was humanity to be exterminated? If not, why not? Using the cipher he had solved, he wrote a reply:

> Available facts indicate enemy concentration in relatively small area. Invader attention fixed on London. Six cylinders still on way, doubtless for targets chosen by subtle instruments. If arrivals continue to show close pattern in Surrey, localized occupation manifest. Full intentions of Martians may clarify, whether extermination of mankind or exploitation.

At the post office, the telegraph clerk stared bewilderedly at the coded message but wired it to Phelps at Birmingham. Back at the inn, Holmes found Martha in the garden of the inn. "You keep very busy," she said. "What have you been doing?"

"Little of consequence. I hope you hven't lost faith in me, dearest."

"No," she said. "My faith in you is all that sustains me now."

In the parlor, Holmes studied the morning papers. None were

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there from London, and the Norwich and Cambridge journals gave only garbled accounts of destruction in the London suburbs. The Heat-Ray and the Black Smoke were mentioned, but with no explanatory details.

"Are trains running south through Langmere?" he asked Martha's uncle.

"South?" echoed the innkeeper. "Bless you, Mr. Holmes, no train dares go south. Some have brought folk up from town. Those that come here, I can't make aught of their stories. They seem fair stunned by what's happened in London."

By evening the inn was filled with pale, unstrung refugees, and the overflow paid high prices for beds in cottages. On the street Holmes met old Dr. Fordham, whom he remembered from his long-ago visit. Fordham's side-whiskered face looked daunted.

"I'd planned to weekend in London," he said. "Then the Martians tramped all through town below the Thames, filling street after street with their Black Smoke and following on through as people ran. I was lucky to get here, aboard a goods train."

"I've had only scanty reports of the Black Smoke," said Holmes. "If they came through it, I fancy it lay too low to hurt them in their tall machines."

"That's right. And they used blasts of steam to reduce it to black grains when it had done its job."

"Useful information," nodded Holmes. "It shows, first, that they aren't bent on exterminating us, since they nullify their vapor when it has routed resistance; and, second, that steam is a counter-agent that perhaps men can use."

He wired these suggestions to Birmingham and to his brother Mycroft in Scotland. Back from Mycroft came congratulations for having escaped. Holmes reflected that if the Martians occupied London, the Black Smoke could no longer be rampant there. He sent further word to Phelps that he would try to return and told Martha the same as they walked in the garden late Monday night.

She clasped his hands in hers. "Please stay," she pleaded. "The danger —"

"Anyone who follows my profession is attracted by danger."

"But I need you here."

"I have obligations to you," said Holmes gently, "but my obligation to mankind is to observe the enemy at close hand. At least, you will be in comparative safety here."

On Tuesday, a telegram from Birmingham informed Holmes that the fifth cylinder had fallen at Sheen in Surrey. He spent the day questioning refugees, trying to

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calculate the intentions of the Invaders. He slept badly that night, waking again and again to wonder if the Martians would enslave man. Would the human race wind up serving these conquerors? But the Martians had machines to serve them. What then? He still wondered when, early Wednesday morning, came more news that not one but two cylinders had struck overnight. The sixth near Wimbleton in Surrey, the seventh directly on Primrose Hill in northeast London. Holmes and Dr. Fordham discussed these reports at breakfast at the inn.

"How could two shots strike almost at once?" demanded Fordham. "These were ten shots from Mars, twenty-four hours apart. The thing's incomprehensible, Mr. Holmes."

"My dear Doctor, you remind me of another medical man, my valued friend Watson," said Holmes. "It is manifest by now that those cylinders are not simply fired from Mars like bullets at a target. The closeness together of the earlier landings strongly suggests that they concentrated their points of arrival. They are able to control speed and direction of flight."

"But if their target is Surrey, why shift to London?"

"The first landings were in relatively open country, from which they could survey the terrain and its hazards. By now they possess London and can land confidently within its limits. Primrose Hill would be a capital place for a command post, rising above the surrounding districts."

Trevor came to their table.

"A train will try to approach London and gather refugees," he said. "Since you're determined to go, I'll drive you to Langmere to board that train. You're reckless, I think, but I've decided to trust your every thought and move."

"Then let's be off," said Holmes, rising quickly.

The refugee train was a long one, and Holmes the only one aboard except the volunteer crew. At Cambridge, Holmes learned that the Martians had easily occupied London and that some of their machines had pursued fugitive crowds all the way east to the sea.

Why that pursuit? he pondered as he rode. *What use, or uses, do these monsters have for men?*

As they rolled below Cambridge, a baleful shadow slid above the train. Holmes looked from his window. Against the June sky soared a distant round object like a saucer in flight. It made a great sweeping turn above them. The train speeded up, and the flying machine curved off to the horizon.

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The train stopped at Ware. Its crew fairly sprang down upon the platform, and two or three men came to talk excitedly. Holmes, too, stepped down. The engineer was there, loudly proclaiming that he would approach London no closer, that the train would seek a siding and turn north again.

"What of your duty to bring back refugees?" Holmes asked him.

"We've enough people here at Ware to load the train, if they hurry aboard," said the engineer impatiently. "No more of that flying thing, not for me. It hung over us like a hawk over a running hare."

"If it wanted you, it would get you as you run," said Holmes. "Good-bye."

"Where are you going, sir?"

"To London," said Holmes, striding off along the platform.

He followed a lane beside the track, with hedges close at hand in case he must hide. Nobody passed, and nobody peered from silent houses. Walking, he ate the sandwiches Martha had made for his lunch. By sunset he reached Chestnut and found food and water in the deserted railroad restaurant. There he rested until, at twilight, he took the way to London again.

The stars came out, and a bladelike new moon. On trudged Holmes, and on. In the small hours of Thursday morning he crossed the bridge over Hackney Marsh and entered the dark, deserted streets of London. There was no sound until, distant but shrill and piercing, rose a wild burst of noise, like a howling siren. Holmes paused, listening. Another howl answered it. The Invaders, he decided, signaling each other. They could hear, then, though not keenly if they needed such deafening signals.

At any rate, he could make out no sign anywhere of the giant machines. Perhaps, like men, they preferred to hunt by daylight. But hunt what? If man was their prey, how would they use him? He turned over several possibilities in his mind.

Weary though he was, he pursued his course in the dark. On his way through Hoxton, he heard a far-off clatter of metal. No human contrivance made such a noise. He wished he were close enough to observe without being observed. At sunrise he found some food in a deserted house and hid in a cellar. There he remained until noon, from time to time hearing the clanking sound of great machines. During the afternoon he progressed homeward slowly, alternately sneaking through deserted streets and taking shelter in basement entries whenever machines appeared in

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the distance. At sunset he emerged from his last hiding place in Bloomsbury and looked around cautiously. No sound or sight of peril. In the evening he again came to Baker Street, mounted the seventeen steps to 221-b, and entered his quarters.

In the dimness he saw that his sheaf of notes and the message to Watson still remained stuck to the mantel shelf. He did not light the gas, but tested the taps and found that water still ran. Drawing a cold bath, he washed himself quickly, feeling much better for it. He lighted his spirit stove and set a kettle of water to boil. Tea and some biscuits made his supper, after which he lay down in his blue dressing gown and slept fitfully. Now and then he wakened to the sound of metallic stirrings, near and far.

He felt hungry at midnight and went down to Martha's headquarters and let himself in with a pass key. From a kitchen shelf he took potted ham, marmalade, a plate of stale scones and a saucer of radishes. With these and some wine he made a second supper. His appetite surprised him. Once he had half-jokingly called himself an intellect, to which his body was but an appendage. Yet that appendage-body needed nourishment. So it must be with the Martians. And what was their food? How much had they brought with them, and was it running short? He finished, lay down and meditated. Meditating, he slept, more soundly.

He woke at dawn Friday, at the sound of the bell. He went to the door. Young Stanley Hopkins, his friend from Scotland Yard, was there, his clothing rumpled, his square jaw stubbled with beard.

"You're alive, Mr. Holmes," panted Hopkins. "Thank God for that! Nobody's at the Yard, nobody much anywhere. Only those Martians, tramping around in their great machines like constables on beat."

"I see you have been riding horseback, and at a fast pace," said Holmes, studying his friend.

"Yes, but how did you know?" asked Hopkins, amazed. "I left the beast on the eastern edge of town."

"There's dried foam on your trouser knee and the skirt of your jacket. If you dismounted at the eastern limits, then you came a long way from that direction, perhaps as far as the sea."

"Yes," said Hopkins wearily, "I've been at the coast."

"Sit down and have something to eat," said Holmes. "There's plenty here. I'll make more tea for both of us."

Hopkins ate eagerly. "Now," said Holmes, "relate what I haven't deduced. Where exactly were you, and what did you see?"

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"I went east, with the great retreat of people from town," said Hopkins. "I had a bicycle, but even then it was an ordeal — a vast scramble, like rats from a burning house." He drew up his broad shoulders, almost shuddering. "I was at the coast by Tuesday, and there was a crowd on the beach already, at the mouth of the Blackwater. Some had been waiting since Monday night. On Wednesday, shipping started to take off the refugees. Then the Martians came up."

"Did you observe much of them?" asked Holmes.

"I had climbed a steeple to watch. Three came along in their machines. They waded out to head off the refugee ships, but then a naval ironclad, a torpedo ram, came to fight. It was a gallant action, Mr. Holmes."

"Undoubtedly, but how successful?"

"The ram blew up, but it smashed two machines, and by then the ships were too far out for the third to follow. That third one threw out Black Smoke, and a flying machine came and put down more, banks of it." Hopkins drank tea. "The Smoke is so heavy that it pours down almost like liquid, and I was high above it in the steeple. When it settled, I came down. I saw only dead about me — hundreds, I should think."

His face looked drawn. Holmes refilled his cup.

"I walked back inland, taking advantage of cover, sometimes hiding and resting, all of Wednesday night and most of Thursday. I scrounged for food and slept once in a barn. Late Thursday afternoon I found the horse, saddled and bridled, but nobody with him. I rode him back — rode him into a lather, as you saw — and before dawn we were at Great Ilford. I left him grazing on a lawn there and came the rest of the way on foot." He set down his cup and stared at it blankly. "Mr. Holmes, what are we to do?"

"Keep our heads, to begin with," replied Holmes. "I've been in the north and got back yesterday. All I've seen of the Martians is dismaying, but they're not omnipotent. I've established several facts about their weapons. And their defense may have interesting chinks."

"Can we stay here in London?"

"Probably. They don't destroy here, as they did in Surrey. We can be circumspect and study them profitably. But just now, Hopkins, why not freshen yourself in the bathroom yonder? You'll find soap, towels and a razor. Then come back and rest on the sofa here."

Holmes's calmness had good effect on the inspector. He shaved

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and washed thoroughly, then fell asleep on the sofa. Holmes sat thinking and now and then making more notes. After a while he dressed and ventured downstairs. No sound or motion there. He crossed to Camden House that stood next to Dolamore's wine and spirits establishment, directly opposite 221-b. The place had stood empty since the arrest of Colonel Sebastian Moran in 1894, but the door was open. Holmes mounted four flights of stairs, then a ladder to the roof. He crept cautiously to peer over the parapet.

To the north he saw the green trees of Regent's Park clear in the bright air from which the London smudge had drifted. There was no sound in the streets, once so busy. He gazed past the trees towards Primrose Hill. Metal glinted in the sun and something moved, perhaps one of those stalking machines. He looked this way and that. Nothing nearer at hand to hint of the enemy. Back down he went and across the street again, meditating.

Seven cylinders had landed before he left Donnithorpe, and presumably an eighth on Thursday night. Two more would come, making ten in all, with a total of fifty Martians — minus three killed in battle — and their weapons. Yet facilities to produce the Heat-Ray and the Black Smoke, so far from their home planet, might well be limited. It remained to define the exact purposes of the invasion and to rationalize and oppose those purposes.

Hopkins woke at noon, much refreshed. He described his adventures at the coast more calmly and fully. "They could have wiped out everyone had they chosen," he said.

"They?" repeated Holmes. "You said that two were destroyed, leaving only one."

"Several more came and joined the survivor. But there was no indiscriminate killing. I saw them scoop people into cages they carried, I don't know why."

"You help me fill in certain details," said Holmes. "I was reflecting that they could have brought only limited armaments across space. The same consideration applies to supplies of provisions. They must forage here on this alient planet."

"Then they will use men for food!" cried Hopkins, dismayed.

"The faculty of deduction certainly seems contagious," nodded Holmes, smiling thinly. "I wonder what their process of feeding may be."

"They consider us lower animals," stammered Hopkins.

"Obviously. But lower animals sometimes outwit men. Baboons may not understand the hunter's

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rifle, but sometimes they ambush a hunter and kill him. In North America, the valiant timber wolf has been almost exterminated, but the clever coyote refuses to be trapped or poisoned and is now more prevalent than ever. Even the common rats survive exterminating devices, thronging in basements and drains. Men sometimes are thwarted, even overcome by animal geniuses."

"Then man himself needs an animal genius," said Hopkins. "Like yourself, Mr. Holmes."

"You flatter me. Observing and deducing in our best human fashion, comprehending abstractions and reaching toward infinites, these are our tasks. Man's descendants, if any, will look back on our science and philosophy much as we, in imagination, picture our prehuman ancestors descending from trees and moving into caves, watching the sunset and questioning themselves about its nature."

"Marvellous!" applauded Hopkins. "And please don't say 'elementary.'"

"But the elementary is the foundation upon which all complex structures of thought are successfully built," said Holmes. "We'll have lunch and then try to call on a friend of mine — Professor Challenger, the sort of rationality we need at this time."

After eating, they headed along empty, soundless streets southwestward into Hyde Park and beyond into Kensington Gardens. They found the Serpentine choked with a great mass of murky-red weed.

"More than one sort of life crossed space," said Holmes, examining a fleshy frond through a magnifying glass. "It grew and spread swiftly, but see this brown wilt upon it. Interesting, Hopkins, and encouraging."

"Encouraging, Mr. Holmes?"

"It spread fast, but it dies fast. Our climate seems unhealthy to those organisms. Perhaps it is equally dangerous to the Invaders who brought them."

They stole along a street below the Gardens. "The Invaders have been here," observed Holmes. "That provision shop has been smashed in."

The exposed interior was violently disordered. Entering, Holmes looked here and there. "The shelves were almost stripped. Here are only a few tins of meat and some fancy biscuits. Put them in your pockets, Hopkins. And here, two bottles of ale. They carried off the rest of the stock."

"Surely not to eat and drink?" suggested Hopkins.

"More probably for those captives you mentioned."

In Enmore Park, they mounted

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the steps of Challenger's home with its impressive portico. The heavy door was locked.

"I begin to fear he was killed at Woking," said Holmes. "They told me there that he suspected the Invaders might not be Martians."

"But they're known to have flown here from Mars."

"Perhaps Mars was only a base," suggested Holmes. "They may have come there from a more distant world. That might account for their seemingly primitive means of traveling here."

"You call it primitive?" said Hopkins uncomprehendingly.

"It is a method which a good human imagination might suggest. I compare it to men crossing a wild stream on makeshift rafts."

Sitting on the top step, Holmes wrote rapidly in his notebook. He tore off several sheets and gave them to Hopkins.

"Off you go," he said. "To Birmingham. Report there to Sir Percy Phelps of the Foreign Office."

"Birmingham's a hundred miles and more away," Hopkins protested.

"Once you're out of London, you'll meet people. You can requisition a horse and carriage, as a police official, and if you travel cautiously, you can avoid pursuit. I insist that you go, Hopkins. I've written a summary of my deductions, most valuable to the defense effort which will soon be mounted."

"Will you not come, too?" urged Hopkins.

"My duty is to collect data here. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data."

"I'll count on Dr. Watson to write about it," said Hopkins. "Surely he survives and will join you."

"I'll never tell him the full story," Holmes assured his friend. "Men may still live to read and write, and I would rather that Watson did not embarrass me by his dramatic praise. And he is ignorant of many things in my private life. Good luck, Hopkins."

They shook hands and parted. Holmes returned the way he had come, alert for any sound or movement in the deserted streets.

Retracing his steps, Holmes told himself that never had his mind worked better or more profitably on an investigation. Probably he knew more about the Invaders, whether from Mars or another world, than anyone now trying to study them. To understand them would be the first step towards coping with them. Again he went through the Gardens and Hyde Park, came out at the Cumberland Gate and was doubly furtive at crossing the broad

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stretches of Uxbridge Road and Edgeware Road, and kept to narrow streets beyond. Afar he heard the howling of an Invader, but could see nothing.

It was early evening when he reached his flat again. Examining his larder, he saw that most of its contents had gone to feed Hopkins. He would do well to forage before darkness fell.

He put on a shooting coat with capacious pockets, and his two-peaked deerstalker cap. Outside, he went along Baker Street to Portman Square, turning upon a street with many shops.

The door of a public house had been kicked in, and not by an Invader: That was evidence that London was not wholly deserted. As at the shop he and Hopkins had entered, there was little to take. He pocketed three oranges and came back to the broken door, peering out with his usual caution.

At about a block's distance towards Baker Street, a figure approached.

His first impulse was to step into view and wave, but he peered again. It was a squat, dark-clad man, who carried a long blade that gleamed in the last rays of sunset.

Holmes drew back inside. The man walked towards him. Holmes retreated to the bar. When the man came in, Holmes smiled with tight-lipped recognition.

"Morse Hudson, no less," he said. "It's been years since I was at your curiosity shop in Kennington Road, tracing the Six Napoleons. I told you aside that you'd best shut up business and vanish, like your wretched father. I deduce you did so — Kennington and all London south of the Thames have been destroyed."

"Never mind where I lodge now," sniffed Hudson. He lifted his weapon, an old basket-hilted saber. He sneezed violently.

"Yes," he wheezed, "I've been following you ever since I saw you come back to London. You're going to tell me where Martha is — Martha, my wife —"

He sneezed again.

"You have a bad summer cold," said Holmes evenly. "If Watson were here, he'd prescribe for you. As for Martha, she never wants to see you again. She is where you could not follow or find her."

"I'll make you tell me." Hudson took a heavy step forward, the saber trembled aloft. "Don't reach for a pocket, Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

"I'm not armed. Consider, Hudson, if you kill me you'll never find Martha."

"I'll find her." Hudson's breath rattled rheumily. "She's my lawful wife."

"You married her when she was

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a trusting girl at Donnithorpe," said Holmes. "Then you fled with your drunken father when he was unmasked as a blackmailing former pirate. You never even said good-bye to her. If the law comes into it, those things are part of the consideration. But I deduce that you mean to take the law into your own hands."

"There's no law any more." Hudson blinked his wet, swollen eyes. "You and I will settle this alone."

"Not quite alone, I think," said Holmes coolly. "Someone else is coming, or rather, something. Hark!"

For metal clanked outside, growing louder as Holmes spoke.

"A fighting-machine," said Holmes.

"An awning, creaking in the wind," mouthed Hudson wildly. "You won't make me afraid, I'm past fear. Tell me where Martha is!"

He advanced another step, saber whirled up. Holmes caught up a bar stool. Hudson cut at him, and the saber's edge bit into the wooden seat of the stool as Holmes parried the blow. Then a sudden wild crash outside. The windows and the door frame collapsed in noisy fragments.

Dropping the stool, Holmes slid toward a rear door that stood partially open. Hudson wheeled, just as a great clatter and hum sounded and the domed body of a fighting-machine lowered into view among the wreckage of glass and lumber.

Holmes slipped inside the rear door like a shadow. He went down four or five dark stairs and turned to look out.

A writhing tentacle, darkly gleaming, swung towards Hudson, who ran half a dozen paces and made a desperate slash with the saber. Its edge broke against the metallic appendage, and it fell to the floor with a loud, double clang.

Hudson screamed. The tentacle had whipped two coils around his body. He struggled and screamed again. His captor whisked him effortlessly away outside.

Holmes tiptoed down into the gloom of a cellar. Small windows gave a faint wash of light. He waited motionlessly, while on the floor above came tappings, scrapings, a crash of glass or crockery. Having secured Hudson, the tentacles were searching for food, such food as men ate. At last the clanking sound resumed, like heavy footsteps. The Invader was departing.

Holmes struck a match. There were kegs of what seemed to be salt fish, crates of dry vegetables, and, on a shelf, tinned delicacies. Quickly he stuffed his pockets with tins of lobster, sardines, tongue,

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and liver pate. Again he climbed the stairs and came to the smashed front of the shop. He heard no sound of danger and stepped outside. Then he brought up short in the early twilight.

The gigantic enemy stood hardly a block away, its cowl turning from side to side. It swung around and came rushing back toward the shop. Holmes faintly glimpsed a steel basket on the monster's back, and a struggling figure inside — Hudson.

He dashed back through the shop and down into the cellar. As he ran, he heard a heavy booming sound like an explosion, as though the whole front wall were broken in. He darted to a coal bin at the rear of the cellar. A square trap showed above. He climbed upon the coal, shoved the trap upward, and squeezed through. As he emerged upon a roofed, paved court, the shop disintegrated behind him.

He dashed down the alley, got through a back door into a haberdasher's opposite and on to where he could see the street beyond. The Martian was raging on that other street, breaking the public house to bits in an effort to find a new prey. But darkness was thickening, and Holmes made his way through several houses, front to back, crossed one street after another. He found himself back on Baker Street. He stopped and listened breathing heavily, but heard no close pursuit. He had shaken off that would-be captor. Wearily he made his way home, up the stairs to his flat, and dropped his jacket with its precious cargo upon the floor. Then he collapsed on his bed in utter exhaustion.

Saturday he reconnoitered, first from the top of his own building, then from the parapet of Camden House, looking through Watson's powerful field glasses. For hours he probed the distances of London, stark and clear with the smoke of industry gone. Once or twice he heard remote siren voices, but he saw no clear movement of the enemy. He considered reconnoitering toward Primrose Hill but rejected the idea as foolhardy. That evening he made more notes to add to his sheaf, until it was too dark to see what he wrote. Again that night he lighted no lamp, but he brought out his violin and played softly to himself to compose his thoughts. About midnight, looking out the window, he saw a flash of green light in the sky — the tenth cylinder, undoubtedly, landing somewhere on the outskirts of London, last of the pioneering expedition. He bathed by candlelight, drank a glass of brandy, and went to bed.

He awoke on Sunday to

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remember that tenth and last cylinder. But there was no hint of menace outside. He studied the case on the mantelpiece that for years had held his hypodermic needle, looked at the bottle of cocaine solution so long unused. He had suggested the use of a needle on a Martian in his letter to Challenger, had wondered about injecting disease germs into the enemy. That letter seemed to have been written long ago. Had Challenger survived to read it?

The need for action possessed him. He went out and moved cautiously along Baker Street, almost to Regent's Park. Primrose Hill and enemy headquarters lay beyond. But then a cry rang out above the trees, and he slid his lean body into the shelter of a basement entry to listen.

Not so strident, so dominating, this time. The sound seemed plaintive, even troubled. He gazed up toward the trees. Past their green tops rose a thread of paler green, the smoke the Martian machines emitted. But it hung motionless. Whatever caused that smoke did not move. Again that plaintive cry, almost as though it pleaded for help.

As he returned home, as stealthily as he had come, the cry rose no more.

In his sitting room, he glanced at his watch. It was nearly noon, and he should eat something. He would have liked a kipper, but decided against a fire to prepare it, and boiled water only for tea, while he opened a box of cracknels and two big tins of choice Italian sardines. After eating, he sat in his armchair, knees drawn up and fingertips together, to rationalize what had happened and what would still happen.

The Invaders moved less freely in captured London. That machine which had chased him on Friday, after securing Morse Hudson, had given up rather easily. Meanwhile, Hopkins must be at Birmingham with the information he had sent. It would help and so would his later discoveries if he could find a way of sending them, things to help mankind face and deal with the danger.

The red weed was a hopeful clue. It built evidence upon conjecture. Strangely swift in growth, it perished almost as swiftly, falling to pieces and washing away in the waters. It could not face Earth's conditions of survival. Might this be an analogy, to apply to the masters of those scouring machines?

Very likely.

Mentally, Holmes reviewed some aspects of history in which this race or that had been assailed by new, deadly plagues. Stalwart Indian warriors, for instance, had

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picked up measles from white frontiersmen, an ailment considered a minor childhood disorder in Europe, and had died by whole tribes. On South Pacific islands, splendid specimens of native man had met death from nothing more serious than the common cold. Morse Hudson had been sick with a cold when that triumphant Invader snatched him in its tentacle. Whatever they did with Hudson, perhaps even devour him, what would they do with, or against his disease?

They were assembled here in captured London. If a plague sprang up among them, none would escape. The forty-odd of them would suffer and perish. Holmes was suddenly certain of that.

Outside the window, a bird sang cheerfully. Holmes smiled, remembering how Martha loved the singing of birds. He was glad she was safe at Donnithorpe and let himself feel hope that he would see her soon, tell her that Morse Hudson would afflict her no more. But just now, he wished he had a companion with whom to discuss his reflections. Too bad Moriarty had been a menace to be killed at Reichenbach Falls. He would have been a brilliant ally, with intellect and courage in this necessity.

Challenger might still have survived the tragedy at Woking. Hopkins had told of refugees sailing to France. Might Challenger have been among them, might he be seeking the aid of European scientists and military experts? Holmes wondered.

But the man Holmes wished for above all others was loyal, dependable Watson, wherever he might be.

Again a smile touched the lean face. How often Holmes had teased Watson for his shortcomings at the science of deduction. As a joke, that was all very well. But Watson was a good scientist, if not a great one. He could grasp and help rationalize the proposition of earthly disease striking down the Invaders, could see that, if the first battles were lost, the war was not lost.

For this was not simply a war of humanity against strangers out of space; it was a true war between worlds. Mother Earth herself was fighting, would prevail against these unbidden, unwanted intruders.

Watson — was he still alive? Would Holmes see him again?

He stooped to fill his cheery-wood pipe with tobacco from the Persian slipper.

The door opened, and Watson stumbled in.

A LETTER FROM DR. WATSON TO H. G. WELLS

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(Editor's note: we append herewith a letter which was written by Dr. Watson to H. G. Wells, and is now published by us at Dr. Watson's request, since Mr. Wells has not replied.)

Dear Mr. Wells:

I am writing to you personally in order to clarify certain matters which have not been fully dealt with. When my first chronicle was published, I received letters from some of your supporters, protesting that the non-Martian origin of the Invaders was not demonstrated by the evidence I offered. These critics maintained that I had succeeded only in raising a reasonable doubt. I therefore wrote a second article, massively proving that the Invaders were not native to Mars, and some of my critics wrote to me and retracted. However, no statements by yourself have ever been passed along to me, and I am therefore challenging you directly.

Your supporters have complained that, in calling your book "frequently inaccurate" and full of exaggerations, I had failed to elaborate. Specifically, I meant that you vastly exaggerated your own experiences, resorting sometimes to pure faking. The contents of the 13th chapter of Book I and of the first four chapters of Book II are partially imaginary. Shortly after your book was published, Holmes did research and found that the curate of whom you wrote was your own invention, simply created in order to discredit Christianity. Your atheism is notorious. In your book you portray yourself as a Christian — or, at least, as a man who believes in God and in prayer — but this is sheer posturing.

The most blatant piece of fraud in the entire book occurs in the chapter entitled *What We Saw from the Ruined House.* You report that you saw the Invaders trying to raise themselves on their hands, but unable to do so because of the terrestrial gravity. This is sheer fabrication, simply intended to support the view that they were native Martians. In my two articles there is ample evidence that the Invaders could move about on our planet as easily as men. The rest of this chapter — apart from the fiction of the curate, since in fact you were alone in the basement — is accurate and informative. But what can be thought of a writer who mixes factual observation with pure invention, just to uphold a questionable thesis? Doubts about the Martian origin of these Invaders were being circulated even while the Invasion was in progress. You had surely heard about this long before you started writing your book, and in order to

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refute the suggestion you resorted to dishonesty.

For the rest, I call attention to these errors:

(1) In your account of the battle at St. George's Hill, the action immediately preceding the discharge of the Black Smoke, you write that the Invader who had been overthrown crawled out of his hood and repaired his support. This is so absurdly impossible that I should not even have to refute it, but apparently I must. In point of fact, the machine was repaired by its two companions, the pilot remaining in his cowl. Holmes learned this at Donnithorpe on Tuesday, June 10, 1902, from scouts who had observed it.

(2) In that same chapter, describing the tragedy in Surrey on the night of June 8, you say that none of the artillerymen near Esher survived the Black Gas. It can be shown, however, that there were many survivors; numerous soldiers realized the danger in time to escape. Holmes interviewed some of them at Donnithorpe, for his presence there was widely rumored, and survivors of the catastrophe naturally sought him out to relate their experiences and hear his conclusions.

(3) You insist in your book that the slaying of an Invader at Weybridge a few hours before the Black Smoke tragedy was a lucky accident, and you quote Moran to the same effect. All of the troops at Weybridge were wiped out by the Ray, but some civilians (notably including yourself) escaped — and several of them contradict you on this point. Their testimony, again given to Holmes at Donnithorpe, clearly shows that the pilot was killed by a shrewdly aimed shell. An officer was heard shouting: "Aim for that turning cowl! It's something like a man's head! A shell striking there is like a bullet through the brain!" One soldier absorbed this order and, with swift and expert marksmanship, aimed the fatal shell. If only his name and his officer's were known, they should have statues in their honor, much like the monument which, at Holmes' suggestion, has been built in memory of the crew of the "Thunder-Child" — an exploit which you describe very vividly in the best and most thrilling chapter of your unequal book.

(4) Your first chapter contains a startling mathematical error. You imagine the Mars-based cylinders as moving at several thousand miles per minute. Yet the first one was fired at midnight on May 12, 1902, and landed just after midnight on June 5. If it had been traveling at a speed of (for instance) about 10,000 miles per minute, it would have crossed the distance in about three days. In

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fact, it took over three weeks.

(5) The Invaders crossed from Mars to Venus shortly after the failure of their expedition to Earth, the Venusian expedition breaking down in October, 1902. This is chronicled in my second essay. Yet you, writing in the year 1908, contend in your *Epilogue* chapter that evidence of the Venusian landing was observed "seven months ago now" by the astronomer Lessing. You therefore disclose a shocking ignorance of the astronomical reporting in the 1902 press — and a gross misunderstanding of what Lessing described in 1907. Lessing, in a letter to Professor Challenger, has retracted his findings, admitting that faulty equipment and hasty judgment were responsible.

I must now correct an error of my own. I wrote my second article without consulting Holmes, and quoted an observation of mine which I now realize to be mistaken. When speaking to Holmes and Challenger, I suggested that the captured specimen might be a late arrival, and that his earlier companions might have already succumbed. But Holmes, upon reading my published article, informed me that this was quite wrong, and that he really should have corrected me at the time. The specimen we captured on the afternoon of June 15 was the first disease fatality. All were dead or dying by the evening of the 20th.

If you ignore this letter, I will have it published.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. John H. Watson, M.D.

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Liz Hufford's first story for F&SF concerns the infinite power of the written word on a planet called Imitia. Ms. Hufford is twenty five, has worked as an artist-illustrator and speech professor. She attended the 1969 SF Clarion workshop and has sold to ORBIT.

The Book Learners

by LIZ HUFFORD

They crucified Christ again; I don't think he did anything this time either. Matthew pointed out to Reinard that this method of determining a true prophet virtually assured the prophet's demise. Reinard shrugged and said there was no reason to believe that prophets had any usefulness outside of martyrdom anyway.

"But, Reinard," Matthew persisted, "isn't it possible that a deranged individual who sincerely believed he was Christ could undergo the agonies of the cross?"

Reinard unconcernedly muttered "yea." He was preoccupied with a lapful of bramble. At his side was a large stack of books. Like all citizens of the planet, he was an avid reader.

"Well, then," Matthew sneered, "it is possible that you martyr charlatans. The system is not foolproof. You must stop this useless cruelty at once."

Reinard, who had been humming as he worked, stopped and addressed Matthew; "Verily I say unto you, if a man is a man and hungers and thirsts and lusts, but denies these things and emulates righteousness, I say that's a lot more godlike than Goddamn heredity."

He began to hum again.

"Did you hear that?" Matthew asked me, "Oh, the hypocrisy of it!"

He stormed away and I followed. It would not be the first time during our stay on Imitia that I would try to mollify an enraged Matthew.

"Matthew," I began, "why is it that Reinard offends you so?"

Matthew glared at me.

"Most clergy would realize that the third commandment specifically forbids taking the Lord's name in vain."

"But, Matthew," I said, "on

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Earth you hear that kind of language every day."

"On Earth," Matthew fumed, "there is not hypocrisy. Those who are not Christian no longer call themselves such. And those of my congregation, I assure you, do not blaspheme the name of God!"

Matthew whimpered at the thought of his congregation. There was not a member under eighty, and some of them were giving up the faith. But Matthew was no more a failure than I. I was chosen for this assignment specifically because I had failed orthodox theology. The divinity school allowed me to graduate for only one reason: I was the first applicant in fifteen years.

Matthew and I reached the ship and returned to our cabins. Matthew, no doubt, dwelt on our lack of success. I, on the other hand, remembered with surpising clarity the day Colonel Hathaway had assigned the mission.

"It was a Russian, a Goddamn Russian! Can you believe that?" Colonel Hathaway said. "Imagine the Reds promoting a religious fanatic to astronaut. He was lost on an outer-space probe. From what we can put together, he crashed on Imitia and was pulled from the wreckage by the inhabitants. He survived a few weeks. The Imitians found this on him."

Colonel Hathaway tossed a small Bible toward me.

"Between the Russian's death-bed religious fervor and this, the Imitians were introduced to Christianity."

"All very interesting," I said. "But what does this have to do with Matthew and me?"

"These new Christians are fanatics," Colonel Hathaway said. "Nothing but prayers, sermons, and communion."

Matthew had thus far been silent. He rose and spoke.

"Men walking in the way of the Lord. That's not what I try to disrupt gentlemen, that's what I strive to achieve."

Head high, he started to leave the room.

"Of course, there is a certain unsavoriness to their religious practice," Colonel Hathaway said.

Matthew stopped. His nose sniffed the air.

"Unsavoriness?" he said, turning.

"Yes," the colonel said. "Their religion is so immediate that several hundred people a year delude themselves into thinking that they are the returning Christ. Since the Bible says there is but one Christ and many false prophets, it was decided that at one time only one Christ could be genuine. The way to determine whether someone is Christ is to

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test his willingness to die for the sins of others. Thus, the Imitia crucify hundreds of people every year."

Matthew clasped his hands to his heart.

"But why do they think they're Christ?" I asked.

"Your assignment," the colonel continued, "is to find out why and to modify their behavior for the sake of ... er ... their souls."

Matthew who was still clasping, clasped harder.

"I personally do not believe that the clergy will provide any solution," the colonel said. "However, our own efforts have failed."

"What approaches have you tried?" I said.

His face colored. "First, we urged them to stop."

"They refused?" I asked.

"They said they would pray for us," he replied dryly.

"And then?"

"We were forced to take disciplinary action. Any radical religious practices would be punished."

"Like crucifixions?" I said.

"Precisely."

"What was the penalty?"

"Death," the colonel said chuckling.

Matthew, who had recently unclasped, reclasped in shock.

"Laughing," he said, "about that!"

"I laughed only at our stupidity,' the colonel said. "Death is light punishment to a people who will be crucified for their belief."

He sighed.

"Then we attempted to collect and destroy all religious material. The next day we would find more than the day before."

"That approach has been historically ineffective," I said.

"It's in their heads," he said. "That's what we want you to change."

"We are to persuade them to accept a more moderate religious viewpoint?" I asked.

"Yes," Colonel Hathaway replied. "You'll be the first missionaries to the planets."

Matthew, who has never appreciated sarcasm, was greatly pleased by this idea. He had read past histories of missionary work. Unfortunately, our society was not so enamored by religion as to sponsor delegates to other planets.

"Well, Colonel," I said, "if the task is to keep these people from killing one another, I'm willing to go."

"Well, it's that of course," he said. "And getting rid of other radical religious practices."

"Such as?" I asked.

The Colonel seemed uncertain.

"It's this whole Christian attitude," he said. "Communal living, simple sharing. It creates

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an unstable work force and an unwillingness to see the advantage in commercial trade."

"Ah," I said. "What do they have that we want?"

He brightened.

"Rare exotic materials long-since depleted from earth. Wood, copper, zinc, handmade artifacts, wild animals."

"Why not just take the stuff?" I asked.

Matthew looked indignant at the suggestion of stealing.

"It wouldn't be moral," the colonel replied sweetly. "Besides it wouldn't work. Gravity and atmosphere. It costs too much to equip men to work there. And no one would want to be stationed there. It's a dull place."

"They practice what they preach," I said. "That's really what you want us to correct, isn't it, sir?"

The colonel looked away from me and straight at a rather confused Matthew.

"They are murderers: I want you to stop this abomination unto the Lord."

That was language Matthew understood. He accepted the challenge. He glowed with fervor.

If I have ever been spiritually called, it was at that moment.

"When do we leave?" I said.

Extensively and expensively equipped for Imitia, we stepped from our ship into a literal biblical land. There were some inconsistencies and some reflections of their new contact with space probe, but basically we found ourselves in a world which had existed centuries ago. We acquainted ourselves with the Imitians and tried to analyze the problem. But the Imitia seemed unwilling or unable to discuss the situation: our attempts left us frustrated and angry.

I thought of Matthew's latest confrontation with Reinard. Perhaps Reinard was the key. If he helped with the crucifixions, drank, and swore continuously, didn't that mean he was somehow exempt from the Christian impulse? Leaving Matthew with the ship, I set out to find Reinard. Perhaps because I was alone, he seemed almost friendly.

"Reinard," I began, "you have read the Bible"?"

"Yea verily," he said.

"Well, if you've read the Bible, you know that swearing is an offense against God."

He nodded.

"Then why do you do it?" I said.

He smiled.

"Books are very strange things. When a man and a woman read the same book, the woman thinks the central character is the heroine;

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the man knows it's the hero. Most people when they read a book identify with the good guy. But I always see myself as a bad guy."

"But many of your people see themselves as Christ," I said.

"A few," Reinard answered. "They are just very visible. There are also many Marys and Peters. In the back lands you would find Adams, Eves, and Moses. The seas are full of whales now that we have this book."

I had always found Reinard's sentence structures peculiar, a combination of English, Imitian, and biblical syntax, but something about this last sentence was really peculiar.

"You didn't have many whales before?" I asked.

"It is hard to remember," said Reinard. "Perhaps we had no seas and no whales."

"I don't understand," I said. "Perhaps if I were to read a book of your history."

"Matthew wanted to do that," Reinard said.

"Well, if he has a history, I'll read his."

"He doesn't have one," Reinard said. "I told him that we had no Goddamn history, and he said I was impossible."

I chuckled.

"But, Reinard, you must have some history."

"You read the Bible," he said.

"But that's not your history, Reinard, but ours, or rather the history of other people long ago. What did you do before the spaceman came?"

"Who would remember that among the book learners," he said. "I suppose we read our books."

"Maybe if I read some of your old literature," I said.

"But you have," Reinard protested. "Matthew said you had seen all the material that Colonel Hathaway collected."

"Well, yes, I did, these were mainly religious books, or books based around a character or incident in the Bible."

Reinard was growing impatient.

"We are the Imitia, the book learners. Before the spaceman and the Bible there were other men and other books, but all from Imitia. They differed very little. Theme and variation. Change occurred slowly. Then the spaceman brought his book. Ideas we had not conceived became our reality."

"Reinard, so you mean that your society completely adopts what it reads?"

"Are not your people swayed by books?"

"Well, tapes mostly, but not to this extent. We don't act out the roles of the characters; we don't live in their environment."

I thought about the whales again.

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"Reinard," I said, "did your planet always look like this or did you build this biblical setting?"

I quickly realized how implausible my question was.

It would be impossible to create a biblical setting as complete as Imitia. But already Reinard was responding.

"Actions come easy to an Imitian," he said. "Ideas are much harder. We know the material of things, but not of ideas. I don't believe there were any whales or seas," he concluded.

No seas or whales. Matthew would never believe me.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," Matthew said. "Tomorrow we must return and make recommendations, and all we have is this impossible theory you've been harping on all week."

"It's what Reinard told me," I said. "And everything I've learned since seems to confirm it."

"Reinard," he said, "blasphemer!"

"What are *you* going to tell Hathaway?" I asked.

"That I'm returning to my congregation," he said.

"And what about you?" Hathaway asked.

"Nothing to add, sir," I said.

"Nothing," he said, "exactly what I expected from the clergy."

I hesitated.

"Well," I said.

"Oh, no," Matthew groaned.

Hathaway looked at me.

"Well, what?"

"Colonel," I began.

Matthew turned away.

"Colonel, since we began exploration of the solar system, we have found many circumstances outside our experience, right?"

"I would grant you that," the colonel said condescendingly.

"Well," I said, "as a race, the Imitians are almost incapable of creative thinking. As you well know, the Imitians are presently in their book stage. But we have no idea how many eons it took them to progress that far. They have no genius, no flash of inspiration. Progress results from one sure, measured step after another. It may be millions of centuries before radio, television, and thought transfer develop on Imitia.

"Living in such stagnancy, the Imitians crave originality, even minimal originality. That's why they are all so desperate for the newest literature. When they plucked the Bible from the Russian wreckage, the effect was astounding. There were literally thousands of new ideas. Like an adolescent with his first great novel, the Imitia got lost in it. They are living the experience."

"I hardly needed you to tell me

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that," the colonel said. "What I wanted to know is how to stop them from living the experience."

"Well, there's one thing I don't think you realize, Colonel," I said.

He looked skeptical, but I continued.

"You will remember that I said the Imitia were devoid of creativity, at least in the mental sense. However, they have been handsomely compensated for this deficiency. Man conceived the airplane years before it became a reality. He spent centuries making the idea a concrete reality. The airplane might be somewhere in Imitia's distant future, but if they conceived the plane today, it would fly tomorrow."

"What?" Colonel Hathaway said.

"Material and action come easy to Imitians. But not ideas."

"Are you telling me that these people create matter?"

"Well, sir," I said, "we can't be sure they are people. There were plenty of pictures of humans in that Bible. If they can create a whole world, they could certainly create a body."

Colonel Hathaway stared at me.

Matthew spoke up:

"It was very unpleasant for us, sir. We exhausted ourselves trying to find a solution. I'm sure that my colleague will feel better when ..."

"I feel fine," I said.

The colonel took a deep breath.

"You," he said to Matthew, "tell me nothing. You," he said pointing to me, "tell me ..."

He shook his head.

"Even if it were true, what would it have to do with the trade problem?" he said finally.

"That's obvious," I said. "The right book or novelette could make the Imitians eager to work and trade. And they'd have anything we wanted in inexhaustible supply."

The colonel scratched his chin and buzzed the psychiatry department. For a week I was examined by the world's top psychiatrists. I was pronounced at least as sane as before the space mission. Except, of course, for my unreasonable adherence to my theory about Imitia. Finally, hoping, I think, to effect my "cure," they recommended a book be sent to Imitia.

"What book will you send?" I asked the colonel.

"Damn it, any book will do," the colonel said.

"No, Colonel," I said. "I know you don't believe me, but on the off chance ..."

"That's an understatement," the colonel murmured.

"On the off chance that I'm right, sir, I'm sure you can see the implications if we sent the wrong sort of book."

"Well, what book would you

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approve?", the colonel asked.

You cannot know how it felt to have the destiny of an entire race as your responsibility.

"Give me a week," I said, "I'll write something suitable."

The colonel groaned.

"You are to check in at psychiatry once a day and get plenty of rest," the colonel said. "What you do with the rest of your time is up to you."

A book to write in a week.

"See you next Friday," I said to the colonel.

As I sat before my typewriter, the Imitia for the first time became a pathetic and vulnerable people. What could be the fate of a race which believed explicitly in the written word? What were the possibilities? Could I make the right choices? My story needed to be compatible with the Bible, for that alien book would still remain within their society. So I wrote of the Imitia, the book people, who since they could live in any possible world ought to live in the best world. They were happy, just, industrious, but not greedy. A friend of mine provided some photographs. It was a beautiful world, rather nineteenth century, I think, except for the conquest of disease, free education, and some other "minor" details.

Exhausted, I finished. The colonel sent copies of my effort to Imitia.

Within a month most of the people had read the book. Paradise, if I may be so bold as to call it that, was spreading. The original men at our base were removed for reason of "nervous exhaustion." Parks, homes, and cities appeared overnight. There were still Christs, crucifixions, and Moses in the back lands, but Imitia was changing. Men were working: an equitable trade agreement could now be arranged. As for me, I had caught the disease of the Imitians: I was enjoying being God.

But several weeks later, as I poured over the latest reports from Imitia, Colonel Hathaway stopped by. He looked rather pale.

"Something wrong, Colonel?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "We've detected a large mass moving towards earth. God knows what it may turn out to be or if it will reach here."

"Where is it coming from?" I asked.

He cleared his throat.

"From the direction of Imitia," he said.

"Imitia," I said. "Must be a comet or something."

"Yes," said the colonel.

"How do you like these reports?" I said, referring to the

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newest reports from Imitia.

"Fine, just fine," he said. "But we expect it will be even better."

"Better?" I asked.

"Had this written up by my department," the colonel said.

It was a book.

"But, Colonel," I said.

"Your effort was fine, just fine," he said. "It proved what we needed to know. This just meets our particular needs."

I opened the book and began to read. It was much better written than mine. It told in great detail the tale of two societies. One was noble and powerful. The other, mundane and weak. The destiny of the strong society was to expand and control. The role of the other was subservience and homage. It was right and inevitable that the superior race master the other. It was the pretty story of imperialism all over again.

"Now I suspect that you won't agree with this approach," the colonel began.

Eden was falling to ruin.

Then it struck me.

"Colonel, the mass. Is it still coming?"

He buzzed his bureau.

"Um, yes, I've got that. No need to worry yet," he said as he switched on the videophone.

I began to laugh.

The colonel looked at me as if I were mad.

"Pardon me," I said, "I was only laughing at your stupidity."

"What?" the colonel said.

"There is a serious problem with this book," I said.

"What problem?"

"Well, tell me, Colonel, when you read a book or listen to a tape, do you identify with the good guy or the bad guy?"

"What?" he said.

"If you were reading this book, whom would you align yourself with?"

"With us, of course," he said.

"You mean the great, powerful, agressive nation," I said.

"Where does it say aggressive?" he said defensively.

The progress screen clearly showed the mass approaching.

"The Imitian Space Force," I said.

"But they don't have any rockets," the colonel said.

"They didn't," I said, as Adam left the Garden.

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THE PLANET THAT WASN'T

I was once asked whether it was at all possible that the ancient Greeks had known about the rings of Saturn. The reason such a question is raised at all comes about as follows —

Saturn is the name of an agricultural deity of the ancient Romans. When the Romans had reached the point where they wanted to match the Greeks in cultural eminence, they decided to equate their own uninteresting deities with the fascinating ones of the imaginative Greeks. They made Saturn correspond with Kronos, the father of Zeus and of the other Olympian gods and goddesses.

The most famous mythical story of Kronos (Saturn) tells of his castration of his father Ouranos (Uranus) whom he then replaced as ruler of the Universe. Very naturally, Kronos feared that his own children might learn by his example and decided to take action to prevent that. Since he was unaware of birth-control methods and was incapable of practicing restraint, he fathered six children (three sons and three daughters) upon his wife, Rhea. Taking action after the fact, he swallowed each child immediately after it was born.

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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When the sixth, Zeus, was born, Rhea (tired of bearing children for nothing) wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes and let the dim-witted lord of the Universe swallow that. Zeus was raised in secret, and when he grew up he managed, by guile, to have Kronos vomit up his swallowed brothers and sisters (still alive!). Zeus and his siblings then went to war against Kronos and *his* siblings (the Titans). After a great ten-year struggle, Zeus defeated Kronos and took over the lordship of the Universe.

Now, then, let's return to the planet which the Greeks had named Kronos, because it moved more slowly against the background of the stars than any other planet and therefore behaved as though it were an older god. Of course, the Romans called it Saturn, and so do we.

Around Saturn are its beautiful rings that we all know about. These rings are in Saturn's equatorial plane, which is tipped to the plane of its orbit by 26.7°. Because of this tipping, we can see the rings at a slant.

The degree of tip is constant with respect to the stars but not with respect to ourselves. It appears tipped to us in varying amounts depending on where Saturn is in its orbit. At one point in its orbit, Saturn will display its rings tipped 26.7° downward, so that we see them from above. At the opposite point they are tipped 26.7° upward, so that we see them from below.

As Saturn revolves in its orbit, the amount of tipping varies smoothly from down to up and back again. Halfway between the down and the up, and then halfway between the up and the down, at two opposite points in Saturn's orbit, the rings are presented to us edge-on. They are so thin that at this time they can't be seen at all, even in a good telescope. Since Saturn revolves about the Sun in just under 30 years, the rings disappear from view every 15 years.

When Galileo, back in the 1610's, was looking at the sky with his primitive telescope, he turned it on Saturn and found that there was something odd about it. He seemed to see two small bodies, one on either side of Saturn, but couldn't make out what they were. Whenever he returned to Saturn, it was harder to see them until, finally, he saw only the single sphere of Saturn and nothing else.

"What!" growled Galileo, "does Saturn still swallow his children?" and he never looked at the planet again. It was another forty years before the Dutch astronomer, Christian Huygens, catching the rings as they were tipping further and further (and with a telescope better than Galileo's) worked out what they were.

Could the Greeks, then, in working out their myth of Kronos swallowing his children, have referred to the planet Saturn, its rings, the

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tilt of its equatorial plane, and its orbital relationship to Earth?

No, I always say to people asking me this question, unless we can't think up some explanation that is simpler and more straightforward. In this case we can — coincidence.

People are entirely too disbelieving of coincidence. They are far too ready to dismiss it and to build arcane structures of extremely rickety substance in order to avoid it. I, on the other hand, see coincidence everywhere as an inevitable consequence of the laws of probability, according to which having no unusual coincidence is far more unusual than any coincidence could possibly be.

And those who see purpose in what is only coincidence don't usually even know the really good coincidences — something I have taken up before.* In this case what about other correspondences between planetary names and Greek mythology. How about the planet that the Greeks named Zeus and the Romans named Jupiter? The planet is named for the chief of the gods, and it turns out to be more massive than all the other planets put together. Could it be that the Greeks knew the relative masses of the planets?

The most amazing coincidence of all, however, deals with a planet the Greeks (you would think) had never heard of.

Consider Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun. It has the most eccentric orbit of any known planet in the 19th Century, so eccentric that the Sun, at the focus of the orbital ellipse, is markedly off-center.

When Mercury is at that point in its orbit closest to the Sun ("perihelion"), it is only 46 million kilometers away and is moving in its orbit at a speed of 56 kilometers a second. At the opposite point in its orbit, when it is farthest from the Sun ("aphelion"), it is 70 million kilometers away and has, in consequence, slowed down to 37 kilometers a second. The fact that Mercury is sometimes half again as far from the Sun as it is at others, and that it moves half again as quickly at some times than at others, makes it somewhat more difficult to plot its movements accurately than those of the other, more orderly, planets.

This difficulty arises most noticeably in one particular respect —

Since Mercury is closer to the Sun than Earth is, it occasionally gets exactly between Earth and Sun, and astronomers can see its dark circle move across the face of the Sun.

Such "transits" of Mercury happen, in rather irregular fashion

(*See *POMPEY AND CIRCUMSTANCE*, F & SF, May 1971)

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because of the planet's eccentric orbit and because that orbit is tilted by 7 degrees to the plane of Earth's orbit. The transits happen only in May or November (with November transits the more common in the ratio of 7 to 3) and at successive intervals of 13, 7, 10 and 3 years.

In the 1700s, transits were watched very eagerly because it was one thing that could not be seen by the unaided eye and yet could be seen very well by the primitive telescopes of the day. Furthermore, the exact times at which the transit started and ended and the exact path it took across the solar disc changed slightly with the place of observation on Earth. From such changes, the distance of Mercury might be calculated and, through that, all the other distances of the Solar system.

It was astronomically very embarrassing, then, that the prediction as to when the transit would take place was sometimes off by as much as an hour. It was a very obvious indication of the limitations of celestial mechanics at the time.

If Mercury and the Sun were all that existed in the Universe, then whatever orbit Mercury followed in circling the Sun, it would follow it exactly in every succeeding revolution. There would be no difficulty in predicting the exact moments of transits.

However, every other body in the Universe also pulls at Mercury, and the pull of the planets — Venus, Earth, Mars and Jupiter — while very small in comparison to that of the Sun, is large enough to make a difference.

Each separate pull introduces a slight modification in Mercury's orbit (a "perturbation") that must be allowed for. The exact modification that is required depends on the exact mass and motion of the object doing the pulling. It is a set of complexities that is very simple in theory since it is entirely based on Isaac Newton's law of gravitation, but is very complicated in practice since the computations required are both lengthy and tedious.

Still, it had to be done, and more and more careful attempts were made to work out the exact motions of Mercury by taking into account all possible perturbations.

In 1843, a French astronomer, Urbain Jean Joseph Leverrier, published a careful calculation of Mercury's orbit and found that small discrepancies persisted. His calculations, carried out in inordinate detail, showed that after all conceivable perturbations had been taken into account, there remained one small shift that could not be accounted for. The point at which Mercury reached its perihelion, moved forward in

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the direction of its motion, just a tiny bit more rapidly than could be accounted for by all the perturbations.

In 1882, the Canadian-American astronomer, Simon Newcomb, using better instruments and more observations, corrected Leverrier's figures very slightly. Using this correction, it would seem that each time Mercury circled the Sun, its perihelion was 0.104 seconds of arc farther along than it should be if all perturbations were taken into account.

This isn't much. In one Earth-century, the discrepancy would amount to only 43 seconds of arc. It would take 4,000 years for the discrepancy to mount up to the apparent width of our Moon and 3,000,000 years for it to amount to a complete circle of the sky.

But that's enough. If the existence of this forward motion of Mercury's perihelion could not be explained, then there was something wrong with Newton's law of gravitation, and that law had worked out so perfectly in every other way that to have it come a cropper now was not something an astronomer would cheerfully have happen.

In fact, even as Leverrier was working out this discrepancy in Mercury's orbit, the law of gravitation had won its greatest victory ever. And who had been the moving force behind that victory? Why, Leverrier, who else?

The planet Uranus, then the farthest known planet from the Sun, also displayed a small discrepancy in its motions, one that couldn't be accounted for by the gravitational pull of the other planets. There had been suggestions that there might be still another planet, farther from the Sun that Uranus was, and that the gravitational pull of this distant and still unknown planet might account for the otherwise unaccounted-for discrepancy in Uranus's motions.

An English astronomer, John Couch Adams — using the law of gravity as his starting point — had, in 1843, worked out a possible orbit for such a distant planet. The orbit would account for the discrepancy in Uranus's motions and would predict where the planet should be.

Adams's calculations were ignored, but a few months later, Leverrier, working quite independently, came to the same conclusion and was luckier. Leverrier transmitted his calculations to a German astronomer, Johann Gottfried Galle, who happened to have a new star map of the region of the heavens in which Leverrier said there was an unknown planet. On September 23, 1846, Galle began his search, and, in a matter of hours, located the planet, which we now call Neptune.

After a victory like that, no one (and Leverrier least of all) wanted to

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question the law of gravity. The discrepancy in Mercury's orbital motions had to be the result of some gravitational pull that wasn't being taken into account.

For instance, a planet's mass is most easily calculated if it has satellites moving around it at a certain distance and with a certain period. The distance-period combination depends upon the planetary mass which can thus be calculated quite precisely. Venus, however, has no satellites. Its mass could only be determined fuzzily, therefore, and it might be that it was actually ten percent more massive than the astronomers of the mid-19th Century had thought. If it were, that additional mass and the additional gravitational pull originating from it would just account for Mercury's motion.

The trouble is that if Venus were that much more massive than was supposed, that extra mass would also affect the orbit of its other neighbor, Earth — and disturb it in a way that is not actually observed. Setting Mercury to rights at the cost of upsetting Earth is no bargain, and Leverrier eliminated the Venus solution.

Leverrier needed some massive body that was near Mercury but not too disturbingly near any other planet, and by 1859, he suggested that the gravitational source had to come from the far side of Mercury. There had to be a planet inside Mercury's orbit, close enough to Mercury to account for the extra motion of its perihelion, but far enough from the planets farther out from the Sun to leave them substantially alone.

Leverrier gave to the suggested intra-Mercurial planet the name Vulcan. This was the Roman equivalent of the Greek god, Hephaistos, who presided over the forge as the divine smith. A planet that was forever hovering near the celestial fire of the Sun would be most appropriately named in this fashion.

If an intra-Mercurial planet existed, however, why was it that it had never been seen. This isn't a hard question to answer, actually. As seen from Earth, any body that was closer to the Sun than Mercury is, would always be in the neighborhood of the Sun and seeing it woud be very difficult indeed.

In fact, there would only be two times when it would be easy to see Vulcan. The first would be on the occasion of a total Solar eclipse, when the sky in the immediate neighborhood of the Sun is darkened and when any object that is always in the immediate neighborhood of the Sun could be seen with an ease that would, at other times, be impossible.

[illegible] way, this offers an easy out, since astronomers can pinpoint

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the times and places at which total Solar eclipses would take place and be ready for observations then. On the other hand, eclipses do not occur frequently, usually involve a large amount of travelling, and only last a few minutes.

What about the second occasion for easy viewing of Vulcan? That would be whenever Vulcan passes directly between Earth and Sun in a transit. Its body would then appear like a dark circle on the Sun's orb, moving rapidly from west to east in a straight line.

Transits should be more common than eclipses, should be visible over larger areas for longer times, and give a far better indication of the exact orbit of Vulcan — which could then be used to predict future transits, during which further investigations could be made and the properties of the planet worked out.

On the other hand, the time of transit can't be predicted surely until the orbit of Vulcan is accurately known, and that can't be accurately known until the planet is sighted and followed for a while. Therefore, the first sighting would have to be made by accident.

Or had that first sighting already been made? Such a thing was possible, and even likely. The planet Uranus had been seen on a score of occasions prior to its discovery by William Herschel. The first astronomer royal of Great Britain, John Flamsteed, had seen it a century before its discovery, had considered it an ordinary star and had listed it as "34 Tauri." Herschel's discovery did not consist in seeing Uranus for the first time, but in recognizing it as a planet for the first time.

Once Leverrier made his suggestion (and the discoverer of Neptune carried prestige at the time), astronomers began searching for possible previous sightings of strange objects that would now be recognized as Vulcan.

Something showed up at once. A French amateur astronomer, Dr. Lescarbault, announced to Leverrier that in 1845 he had observed a dark object against the Sun which he had paid little attention to at the time, but which now he felt must have been Vulcan.

Leverrier studied this report in great excitement, and from it, he estimated that Vulcan was a body circling the Sun at an average distance of 21 million kilometers, a little over a third of Mercury's distance. This meant its period of revolution would be about 19.7 days.

At that distance, it would never be more than 8 degrees from the Sun. This meant that the only time Vulcan would be seen in the sky in the absence of the Sun would be during, at most, the half-hour period before

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Sunrise or the half-hour period after Sunset (alternately, and at ten-day intervals). This period is one of bright twilight and viewing would be difficult, and so that it was not surprising that Vulcan had avoided detection so long.

From Lescarbault's description, Leverrier also estimated the diameter of Vulcan to be about 2,000 kilometers, or only about a little over half the diameter of our Moon. Assuming the composition of Vulcan to be about that of Mercury, it would have a mass about 1/17 that of Mercury or 1/4 that of the Moon. This is not a large enough mass to account for all of the advance of Mercury's perihelion, but perhaps Vulcan might only be the largest of a kind of asteroidal grouping within Mercury's orbit.

On the basis of Lescarbault's data, Leverrier calculated the times at which future transits ought to take place, and astronomers began watching the Sun on those occasions, as well as the neighborhood of the Sun whenever there were eclipses.

Unfortunately, there were no clear-cut evidences of Vulcan being where it was supposed to be on predicted occasions. There continued to be additional reports as someone claimed to have seen Vulcan from time to time. In each case, though, it meant a new orbit had to be calculated and new transits had to be predicted — and then these, too, led to nothing clearcut. It became more and more difficult to calculate orbits that included all the sightings, and none of them successfully predicted future transits.

The whole thing became a controversy, with some astronomers insisting that Vulcan existed and others denying it.

Leverrier died in 1877. He was a firm believer in the existence of Vulcan to the end, and he missed by one year the biggest Vulcan flurry. In 1878, the path of a solar eclipse was to pass over the western United States, and American astronomers girded themselves for a mass-search for Vulcan.

Most of the observers saw nothing, but two astronomers of impressive credentials, James Craig Watson and Lewis Swift, reported sightings that seemed to be Vulcan. From the reports, it seemed that Vulcan was about 650 kilometers in diameter and only 1/40 as bright as Mercury. This was scarcely satisfactory, since it was only the size of a large asteroid and could not account for much of the motion of Mercury's perihelion, but it was something.

And yet even that something came under attack. The accuracy of the

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energy, and this is equivalent to a certain, much smaller, quantity of mass. Since all mass gives rise to a gravitational field, the Sun's gravitational field, when viewed as mass, must give rise to a much smaller gravitational field of its own.

It is this second-order pull, the small gravitational pull of the mass-equivalent of the large gravitational pull of the Sun, that represents the additional mass and the additional pull from within Mercury's orbit. Einstein's calculations showed that this effect just accounted for the motion of Mercury's perihelion, and accounted further for much smaller motions of the perihelia of planets farther out.

After this, neither Vulcan nor any other Newtonian mass was needed. Vulcan was hurled from the astronomical sky forever.

Now to get back to coincidences — and a much more astonishing one than that which connects Kronos's swallowing of his children with the rings of Saturn.

Vulcan, you will remember, is the equivalent of the Greek, Hephaistos, and most famous myth involving Hephaistos goes as follows—

Hephaistos, the son of Zeus and Hera, at one time took Hera's side when Zeus was punishing her for rebellion. Zeus, furious at Hephaistos's interference, heaved him out of heaven. Hephaistos fell to Earth and broke both his legs. Though he was immortal and could not die, the laming was permanent.

Isn't it strange, then, that the planet Vulcan (Hephaistos) was also hurled from the sky. It couldn't die, in the sense that the mass which supplied the additional gravitational pull had to be there, come what may. It was lamed, however, in the sense that it was not the kind of mass that we are used to, not mass in the form of planetary accumulations of matter. It was the mass-equivalent, instead, of a large energy-field.

You are not impressed by the coincidence? Well, let's carry it further.

You remember that in the myth about Kronos swallowing his children, Zeus was saved when his mother substituted a stone in the swaddling clothes. With a stone serving as a substitute for Zeus, you would surely be willing to allow the phrase "a stone" to be considered the equivalent of "Zeus."

Very well, then, who flung Hephaistos (the mythical Vulcan) from the heavens? Zeus!

And who flung the planetary Vulcan from the heavens? Einstein!

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figures reported for the location of the object was disputed and no orbit could be calculated from which further sightings could be made.

As the 19th Century closed, photography was coming into its own. There was no more necessity to make feverish measurements before the eclipse was over, or to try to make out clearly what was going on across the face of the Sun before it was all done with. You took photographs and studied them at leisure.

In 1900, after ten years of photography, the American astronomer Edward Charles Pickering announced there could be no intra-Mercurian body that was brighter than the 4th magnitude.

In 1909, the American astronomer William Wallace Campbell went further and stated categorically that there was nothing inside Mercury's orbit that was brighter than the 8th magnitude. That meant that nothing was there that was larger than 48 kilometers in diameter. It would take a million bodies of that size to account for the movement of Mercury's perihelion.*

With that, hope for the existence of Vulcan flickered nearly to extinction. Yet, Mercury's perihelion *did* move. If Newton's law of gravitation was correct (and no other reason for supposing its incorrectness had arisen in all the time since Newton), there had to be some sort of gravitational pull from inside Mercury's orbit.

And, of course, there was, but it originated in a totally different way from that in which anyone had imagined. In 1915, Albert Einstein explained the matter in his General Theory of Relativity.

Einstein's view of gravitation was an extension of Newton's, one that simplified itself to the Newton version under most conditions, but remained different, and better, under extreme conditions. Mercury's presence so close to the Sun's overwhelming presence was an example of the extreme condition that Einstein could account for and Newton not.

Here's one way of doing it. By Einstein's relativistic view of the Universe, mass and energy are equivalent, with a small quantity of mass equal to a large quantity of energy in accordance with the equation $e = mc^2$.

The Sun's enormous gravitational field represents a large quantity of

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**This is correct as far as we know. To this day, the only objects known to have approached the Sun more closely than Mercury does, have been an occasional comet of negligible mass, and the asteroid Icarus, which is only a kilometer or two across. See UPDATING THE ASTEROIDS, F & SF, August 1974.*

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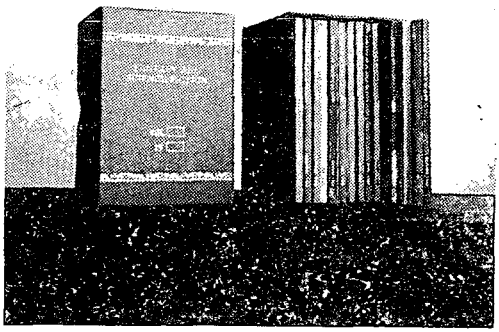
And what does "ein stein" mean in Einstein's native German? "A stone"!

I rest my case.

We can say that the Greeks must have foreseen the whole Vulcanian imbroglio right down to the name of the man who solved it. — Or we can say that coincidences can be enormously amazing — and enormously meaningless.



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Here's an absorbing variation on the classic "first contact" theme, from Jim Girard, who writes: "Born 1944, grew up in Wichita, went to University of Kansas and was admitted to the graduate writing seminars at Johns Hopkins, from which I took an MA in 1967. Worked as a general assignment reporter and city editor for the Topeka Capital-Journal. Until 1973, all my writing was of the 'serious' mainstream variety; at that point I decided that I ought to turn my talents, such as they are, to something that paid, and, since I'd been reading science fiction all my life, I decided to try writing it."

Something's Coming

by JAMES P. GIRARD

I don't think anyone has drawn a connection between last year's rains and the arrival and departure of the Visitors, unless all that gloominess, from January to June, was one of those signs men used to look for in things: one of God's metaphors. Looking back, of course, it's easy to impose patterns on memory; for example, the start of the whole thing is connected in my own mind with the strange bones that washed out of the bank of Grasshopper Creek.

A farmer named Hinman, with his three grown sons, found the bones while checking the creek banks to see where they'd fallen in from the rains. Thinking someone had met with foul play, the Hinmans called the sheriff and then the newspaper, though by that time we'd already caught it over the air, monitoring the sheriff's band. We'd sent a stringer out to the site, first thing, but before Ben Sorter and I could get mobilized to drive out through the muck of the back country roads, someone had already established that the two skeletons — one adult and one small child — were about a century old. So instead of an in-depth, behind-the-scenes crime investigation story, we found ourselves doing an historical feature.

Mostly I remember Ben cursing as his car wallowed in the section line ruts, his oil pan scraping up mud from the center hump; then the tangled puzzle of the dark bones against the darker mud, the three of us balancing uneasily on the little hill made by the excavation while Hinman, the big farmer, rumbled out his recently learned litany of all the ways folks from 100 years in the past might

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have died here, far, even then, from any settlement: "Freezing, starvation, disease, animal attack, Indian attack — lots of ways for folks to die."

But he agreed with Ben, whose photographer's eye had made sense out of the jumble quicker than mine had, that the two seemed huddled together, as if in fear of some death they knew was coming.

"What I can't figure," he said, "is why it's just the two of them here. There must have been more people, but where are they? Maybe they escaped, but then...who would escape and leave a little child to die? A cowardly adult, I suppose, though I don't like to think it was one of the parents...or maybe another child...but why would one child escape and not the other? Well...it just seems odd to me."

"Or maybe there weren't any others," I said, a bit brusquely, perhaps, with a widower's sensitivity to those who assume that every family must have two adults. (How many times have I been invited to "talk it over with your wife before you buy," and how many times was Sarie told, her first year of school, to have her mommy sign for something or other?) But I knew what he meant about the skeletons — I could feel it, too — the wrongness of their having died out here like this, isolated and alone and incomplete somehow, waiting for something so obvious to them and so mysterious to us.

And it was that same night, I think, that Timmy's fear began. I remember I was deep into my "real" writing, the newspaper story done, and I had thought the kids were long asleep when I paused to take a drink of coffee and heard the sound of regular sobbing from down the hall. Had it been one of them screaming over some imagined offense, I could have shut it out and gone on, but there is something about regular sobbing, no matter how soft, that penetrates any mood.

And besides, at the same moment, there was a light knock on my door and Sarie's voice, saying, "Daddy? Timmy won't be quiet and I can't sleep."

That made it serious. She'd probably been standing out in the hallway for some time, waiting for the typing to let up, having learned from painful experience not to interrupt me at such times. Since Marian's death I haven't always been the understanding father she allowed me to be by heading off such problems. Timmy was still a defiant self-confident almost-three-year-old who spent a lot of time bouncing off of walls and furniture, being too contemptuous of the material world to watch where he was running and holding adults and their odd ways in only slightly

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higher esteem. But Sarie, at six, had a year of kindergarten under her belt and had begun to feel that she had a personal investment in the order of the world. It had been a long time since she had come knocking at my door in the middle of the night, not really since that bad time when we had sometimes cried together in the dark. Timmy had never known such times, finding it perfectly normal for one's family to consist of a father and a sister. That was another reason that it seemed disturbingly odd to find him weeping as if heartbroken, sitting up in his bed with the blanket wrapped around him like a tepee, only his grimy tear-streaked face sticking out.

"What's the matter, Tim?" I asked, and he paused to catch his breath.

"Something's coming," he said accusingly, which is a normal style of speech for a three-year-old in distress.

"What? What's coming?"

He just shook his head and his face clouded up again. Sometimes he thought there were bears outside his window, and once, for a brief period, he'd been so worried about snakes that he wouldn't eat spaghetti. ("My supper is a snake," he'd told me seriously, and it hadn't helped when I'd burst into laughter.) In the right mood, he could be terrified of just about anything, but it usually had a name.

"It's coming to get me," he said, and began wailing louder than before. I went next door to the bathroom for a washrag to wipe away the smears of dirt on his face where he'd been rubbing at his eyes and nose. Sarie looked at me exasperatedly as I came back, her hands clasped over her ears.

"Dummy, dummy, dummy!" she shouted as I daubed at Timmy's face. "You're a big dumb baby."

Timmy responded with a short burst of angry crying, then lapsed back into the soft sobbing.

"Be quiet, Sarie," I said. "Tim. Come on, listen to me, will you?" I figured I'd have to root this thing out quickly or I'd never get back to my writing or, worse, wind up with both of them in there in my bed, fighting and chattering till dawn. "There's nothing coming," I said decisively. "If there was anything or anyone outside, Charlie would be barking, wouldn't he?"

Timmy toned the sobs down to sniffles for a moment and considered it glumly.

"Charlie'll scare away those bears," he said. It was an old, rather timeworn formula of reassurance, and he didn't really sound too confident about it. "Charlie's my friend," he added doubtfully.

"Is it those old bears?" I asked,

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and saw right away I'd made a mistake because his eyes snapped wide open and he shook his head quickly, spasmodically, and screamed, "It's gonna get me."

"You're silly," Sarie screamed back. "There aren't any bears outside. Bears are out in the country."

I raised a hand to shush her.

"I don't think it's bears," I said softly, beginning to feel vaguely worried. There wasn't anything in my experience with Sarie to help me deal with an unreasonable, unidentifiable fear.

"He's still silly," she said, beginning to sulk. "Daddy, I want to go to sleep. I'm tired."

"I know." I was silent for a while longer, sitting on the edge of his bed, watching him cry; then I said, "Come on, Tim," and shoved him gently down onto his side, his head on his pillow. To my surprise, he didn't resist. "You need to calm down and go to sleep," I said. "There's nothing outside. There's nothing coming. There's nothing going to get you. You're all right. Everything's okay. Charlie's right outside in his house, and Sarie's right here in her bed, and I'm in my bedroom, right down the hall. You know we wouldn't let anything get you. None of us would. Okay?"

He nodded, nearly silent now, though breathing jerkily in little unvocalized sobs. I tucked the cover up around his chin, smoothed his cheek with my hand, and got up. When I paused in the doorway to look back, he was still lying on his side, his lips tight together, staring at me.

"Night," I said, and his lips moved enough to form the word "night," but there was no sound.

Later, toward morning, I awoke to find him curled up beside me. For all his nighttime fears, it was the first time he had ever come to my room like this, except when Sarie had done so and when she was having one of her terrible sad nightmares about being left all alone. Then Timmy would wake up to find her gone and come crying to my room, demanding that she come back and keep him company. But never before had he been the one to desert their room for mine.

I lay awake for a time in the dark, puzzled by the heavy knowledge that something profound had happened in my son's life, and that I had no way of knowing what it was.

But he seemed no fussier than usual the next morning, and so I was quite unprepared that night when it happened all over again. Since I wasn't in a writing mood, I tried to get at it by questioning him and only succeeded in making him hysterical. In the end I had to rock him to sleep in the darkened living

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room, as if he were a one-year-old with the colic. When I came in to put him in his bed, Sarie whispered to me that he had cried all day at the babysitter's about "something coming to get him."

I called Mrs. Appelman from work the next morning, and she told me there was something still troubling him, something she couldn't divine, something that made him fretful and babyish, even by daylight.

"Yesterday I thought maybe he'd just had a bad dream," she said. "But he can't seem to let go of it even when he's playing. Goodness, he's got little Ann Stokstad going on about it, too. Her parents said she woke up screaming in the middle of the night and they couldn't get her to sleep again. She and Timmy are the two youngest, and they're together a good deal. So I guess it isn't surprising, but it is disturbing. I've never seen anything quite like it before, and I've been taking care of children, my own and other people's, for more than thirty years. If it's still bothering him this time next week, I'd think seriously about seeing a doctor."

In contrast to Timmy's mood, the wet gloomy weather suddenly brightened. It was sunny two days in a row, and there was no moisture in the forecast. Things even began to dry out, though there was still a kind of sogginess underfoot everywhere, as if the world were dew-soaked.

Early releases began to come in, for rewriting, about the state fair a month away, and everyone at the paper got a little irritable in anticipation of the reams of agate listings to be typed and the endless pointless features on aging contortionists and tongue-tied blue-ribbon winners.

Sarie and I were getting irritable anyway, from lack of sleep, and when Timmy insisted on screaming incoherently for the fifth night in a row, I lost my temper and began to spank him. Things got worse geometrically, and after two more spankings I gave in to my own guilt and took him into my bed with me to hold him till he could fall asleep. I thought Sarie would insist on joining us, but she seemed glad to be alone in her own room with nobody crying.

"Those dumb little kids," she told me bitterly. "All they do is cry all day long. They're just scared all the time, with nothing to be scared of."

With Timmy more relaxed, in my big bed, I tried once more to draw him out about his fears, but it was like touching a trigger. His fear seemed to have become tinged with a kind of desperate unhappiness.

"I'm just a baby," he said once, apropos of nothing. "I'm not a big

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boy." And I guessed that this was what the other children, and perhaps Mrs. Appelman herself, had been saying to shame him out of the silly nagging fear, but he had accepted shame and fear both. I thought again of Mrs. Appelman's suggestion that I seek medical help.

As it turned out, Dr. Barry, the kids' pediatrician, called me at work, but he wasn't able to offer much help. He'd been getting a lot of cases of apparent acute paranoid depression, especially in younger children, and wondered if we'd heard about anything "going around" elsewhere in the state.

Telling him I'd call him back, I checked the wire, finding nothing, and then, on a hunch, talked to Ernie Bennett, the courthouse writer, whose wife was a nurse in the hospital's labor-and-delivery section, and to Joe Cobb, the late man, who kept in close touch with the emergency wards around the state. Both, it turned out, had heard gossip lately about difficulties in hospital nurseries in the area — babies crying themselves to exhaustion, refusing to nurse, and the like — but it had been chalked up variously to supersonic vibrations from hospital equipment, disagreeable hospital odors, general gloominess associated with the weather, and so on. Apparently, no one had thought to connect any of it, regarding it, in each case, as a local phenomenon.

When I called Dr. Barry back, he was silent for a few moments, then asked me to hold off on a story about the whole thing until we could determine that it really was more than some kind of odd multiple coincidence. But writing a news story was the least of my concerns.

"What can I do about Timmy?" I asked.

He was silent again, then said, "Offhand, I'd suggest increased personal contact, support, affection, reassurance...you know. Keeping in mind, of course, that I'm no shrink."

"You think it's psychological?"

"Who knows? It seems to be spreading like a physical disease."

And so it did.

"All of a sudden, they're all scared," Mrs. Appelman told me, waving a hand distractedly at the door of the den, through which I could see two of the older boys she took care of slumped side by side on a couch, staring glumly at the television set, where the Munster family cavorted. Except for the TV show, the room was silent. Mrs. Appelman seemed a bit apprehensive herself. "All they really want to do is hang around me, like babies," she said, "and when I won't let them do that, they just sit an-

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stare, as if I were punishing them by making them sit in one spot, as if they'd rather be anywhere else. But they won't get up and play. They could move anytime they want to, but they've just been sitting like that most of the day."

I could tell in the car, on the way home, it was going to be a miserable evening. Timmy had settled the day before into a kind of soft, dry sobbing, and we had almost gotten used to it, as if it only happened to be the way he breathed, but his eyes were puffy and his cheeks and nose perpetually grimy from rubbing away tears. Now Sarie was sunk in silence, staring straight ahead, lips tight and eyes wide, exactly as she'd looked the first time she'd ridden the little roller coaster at Kiddieland: scared, but hanging on. In her appearance, more easily than in Timmy's, I could see how real the thing was that was eating inside her, the gnawing sensation of things gone fundamentally wrong in the world. She reminded me of myself two years back, trying to make sense out of a universe without Marian in it, learning to cope with so much grief, hers and mine, while dealing with the needs of one so small and new he hadn't the tact to let others mourn in peace and feel sorry for themselves. It had been Timmy, who had no pity, who saved me then, but now I could seem to find no way to save him from whatever he thought was coming for him, and I was in danger of failing Sarie as well. Coming up the stone walk to the dark house, guiding Sarie with one outstretched hand before me, while Timmy, who couldn't be trusted to avoid the mud, clung to my neck in front, I felt the burden of that odd self-pitying guilt one gets from being only one parent when two are needed.

But at least Sarie was able to talk about it, to a degree.

"I think something very terrible is going to happen," she told me. "But I don't know what. There's something that might happen to Timmy and me. It just scares me, but I can't think very well about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I try to think about what it is, and I just get scared. It just makes me more scared. But I want to think about it more because...I almost know what it is."

"It's like something you can't quite remember, no matter how hard you keep thinking about it?" I offered.

She nodded as if thinking about something else, then shook her head abruptly.

"No...sort of, only...only I think I could think about it if it just didn't scare me so much."

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"Do you try not to think about it at all?"

She shook her head again.

"I can't. I'm just always thinking about it. It's just always there."

"Is it coming closer?"

Her face screwed up exactly the way it does when I've caught her at something very bad and am probably going to spank her. I could see this was something she didn't want to talk about, but she nodded solemnly, her eyes blinking rapidly. I pulled her onto my lap and said, "Look, you're old enough to know I wouldn't let anything get near you that might hurt you."

She nodded, but looked doubtful.

"I think this is awful big," she said.

According to Mrs. Appelman, the fear had come gradually to Sarie and the other older children, the irritation with the little ones turning to a general touchiness, a vague unease, an infantile feeling of insecurity, and finally an outright fear of something not-quite-thinkable.

I called Dr. Barry at his home, but he could only repeat what he'd said earlier, except to confirm that the "disease" was spreading to older children generally — and picking up momentum. It had taken about three days to go from the three-year-olds to the four-year-olds, he said, but that had happened only the day before, and now the six-year olds had it.

"Perhaps we'll get some physiological information from the older children," he said, but he didn't sound hopeful.

There was a perverse kind of advantage, for me, in both children having the fear: I was able to sleep that night, since Timmy and Sarie slept together in Timmy's bed, giving each other someone to hold onto. I slept in Sarie's bed beside them, my feet stuck out over the end, thinking, mostly, before I drifted off, how insidious a thing it was, this indistinct fear that struck at the innocent confidence of the young, destroying what was in fact their only strength in a world already full of nameless dangers.

When I finally mentioned the whole thing to Clark, the city editor, I was somewhat relieved to find him largely uninterested, since I didn't really want to do the story.

"Not everything that's strange is news," he told me. "But it might be worth a graph. I'll have the health writer check it out."

I don't know if that graph got written or not. Within two days the epidemic had gotten too big for local coverage. The first indication was a short release from the Menninger Foundation Children's Clinic, reporting an alarming rise in the number of young children

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being treated for acute paranoia.

By the end of the week, that story and others like it had gotten buried in some even more alarming statistics: a dramatic surge in the number of suicides among preadolescents and teen-agers. These oldest children gave names to their fears, leaving notes that spoke of drugs, the bomb, pollution, political oppression, bigotry, all the things we ought tof fear, but don't usually. What it all seemed to add up to was a generalized fear about the future — a kind of extreme hopelessness.

Despair, in fact, was what the various religious establishments decided to call it: the ultimate sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, the unforgivable sin. Somehow the children were being compelled, as Job was urged, to curse God and die. Our church page filled suddenly with syndicated debates over the question of whether it portended the true Second Coming, or the advent of some Antichrist, some final judgment. Even secular theologians had metaphysical views to fit.

"God is literally dead," said one, "and the children somehow know it."

There were other opinions. Medical science settled on the notion of an unknown virus that attacked the nervous system, and social service agencies launched crash fund drives to pay for research to fight back against the "epidemic of fear." Anthropologists spoke of the final breakdown of cultures, with an accompanying sense of anomie for those trying to be socialized into a society in chaos. Others of various disciplines and persuasions claimed that the young somehow grasped intuitively the race's destruction of itself through war or pollution or general wrong thinking. The Jehovah's Witnesses and innumerable other apocalyptic faiths moved their calendars up. Four of our cartoonists abruptly closed out their strips. Television programs that featured charming happy children, on the other hand, not only stayed on the air, but began to dominate the early evening schedule, as the networks seemed to be battling reality with reruns of Beaver and Jody and Buffy and the like.

One ethologist reminded readers of the inexplicable demise of the dinosaurs and linked the teen-age suicides to the strange spontaneous deaths of jack rabbits in areas where population had outstripped food supply.

"What if there are clocks in our minds?" he asked. "Clocks that tell us when our time has come. If there are, could it be that something has now touched off the alarm?"

Ten days after Timmy's first fearful night we began getting the

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same kinds of reports from other countries. There was always a small group hovering around the AP and UPI wires in the newsroom, reading of the course of the "epidemic" in England or Brazil or Japan or, finally, in the Soviet Union, and of the views of experts, of the research being conducted by a hundred different scientific and philosophical disciplines, of the infinite varieties of unhappiness caused already, these last items elicited with exquisite care by the famous writers so many of us were used to envying.

But, as so often happens when unhappiness is widespread, even the most poignant stories lost some of their sharpness. Particular grief was swallowed by a general concern, which itself faded in the dark light of one's own anguish, till even I began to resent the media's treatment of something it saw as a broadly intercultural crisis — while I went home each night to Timmy's swollen face and unvocalized sobs, and Sarie's quiet hauntedness. I did a write-through on what we knew of the "epidemic" locally — just facts and figures. Clark approached me very gingerly about a first-person piece, since I'd first brought the whole subject to him, but he backpedaled quickly when I growled at him. Someone else was sent to do the interviews with parents.

Then, two weeks from the day when Timmy had told me something was coming, something came.

Dingdingdingdingdingdingding ding ding ding ding ding ding...

"Jesus Christ! What in the..."

That was a short conversation between a teletype and Joe Clark, and then the whole newsroom turned into a small mob around the machine. The last time anyone had rung the bells that long and that urgently, I was later told, had been in November of 1963 when an AP correspondent in Dallas had leaned on his bell for what seemed forever, as such moments do, whichever end you're on; and everyone, even those craning to see the message, feels a sudden reluctance to let go of the static urgency of the signal bell and to get on to whatever thing has happened.

"Did they nail another one?" someone asked, and then the machine spat out:

URGENT URGENT
YRGEBT YGR
Spaceships landinxxxxx
Vehicles, apparently spaceships have landedxxxx appeared over Grand Islad, Ne
bust bust bust bust

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — Large vehicles ap-

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parently alien to this planet, appeared over this city at approximately 10:20 a.m. today.

more to come

insert: make that "flying saucershaped" following "Large"

make that "saucer-shaped"

more to come

js 10:32 acd

There was a sudden startling silence because this was only the second or third time in the nine years I'd worked on the *Mid-American* — and the first time that it wasn't just a coincidence — that all the teletypes stopped at the same time, making a fleeting picture in my mind of wire operators all over the world hunched forward in their swivel chairs, waiting to read what would come next. Then several people began giggling nervously, and there were muffled exclamations about the silence (for the first time in my life I noticed the pervasive rumble of the presses from two floors below, but no one mentioned the wire message for a moment, and then Mac Zook, the aged slotman, grumbled: "It's either page one or nothing at all. Go back and tell them we may have to hold for a bulletin and a chaser."

He spoke to Ronnie Schaff, the copyboy, who started to take off, then froze as the teletype started up:

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A massive evacuation of the Grand Island area began shortly before 11 a.m. today, extending for a radius of about 75 miles, following sighting about 10:20 a.m. of an undetermined number of large black objects hovering above the city.

Early reports from the immediate vicinity described the objects as "spaceships" or "flying saucers."

Residents of Grand Island itself, including all those who first reported seeing the objects, were being quarantined by National Guard units following evacuation.

A spokesman for the governor's office here said the orders for evacuation for a 75-mile radius, plus quarantine of those closest to the sighting, came from Washington, presumably from the Pentagon.

Though there were reports of sightings from as far away as 50 miles from Grand Island itself, details remained sketchy. Observers agreed that there were more than six of the objects, that they were a "dull black", and that they appeared to be descending.

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Estimates of the size of each object ranged from the size of a helicopter to the size of an ocean liner. Those from nearest the sighting generally have given larger estimates.

All newsmen in the Grand Island area apparently have been quarantined, including Associated Press correspondent Jon Sands, who filed the initial report. All communication and transportation to and from the area has been curtailed, except for those being removed under National Guard supervision.

State officials this morning disavowed any connection with the evacuation, and no federal or Guard officials have been available for comment.

more to come

bh 11:04 acd

"It's some kind of maneuver," said Clark, as if that settled it. "They couldn't have gotten in so fast if it wasn't. It sounds like the Guard was just poised, waiting."

"Either that or another *War of the Worlds,*" someone said derisively, and there were a few murmurs of assent, and the crowd between the copy desk and the machines began scattering back into the rest of the newsroom. The teletypes started their arhythmic cadence again, as if everyone everywhere were coming up with reasonable explanations of their own.

Frank Barnes, the military affairs reporter, was impressed by the size of the evacuation and worried that the whole thing might be a misinterpretation of the capture of a Soviet or Chinese spy plane. He obviously wanted to be there, but Clark wasn't ready to take it seriously yet.

Martin, the senior copy editor and the newsroom's number-one cynic, dismissed it, as he did everything, by posing the easiest explanation: "It's a balloon."

Apparently the only one ready and willing to believe that it might really be men from Mars, I found myself standing alone beside the wire machine, watching for adds. Because of that, I was also the first one to notice that half a dozen hospitals and clinics were simultaneously reporting a sudden dramatic end to the "fear epidemic."

Mrs. Appelman was bursting with the news when I called her to check. She hadn't heard anything about whatever was going on at Grand Island.

"Isn't that something?" she said. "I'll have to turn on the news at lunchtime. I expect it's some kind of publicity stunt."

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"If it is, somebody's going to be in a lot of trouble."

She made some sort of indistinct sound of agreement, then said, "I just hope this thing with the children is over for good. They do seem back to normal. Maybe it was just some kind of funny sickness. I tell you, I've been so depressed over it."

"I know," I said. "We all have."

"Well, let's just pray it stays gone. It'll be good to read about these spaceships or whatever they are, instead of about so many unhappy people and all those young people killing themselves. Perhaps it will be a nice summer, after all."

I watched most of the news that evening with only half a mind, submerged in a kind of drowsy joy at having Timmy and Sarie back again. Except for the traces of puffiness on Timmy's face and the bone-weariness we all felt, now that we could relax, you couldn't have told we'd been through a two-week ordeal. Now that it was over, I found I didn't care whether I ever knew what had caused it. It had the feel of a thing that happens only once.

The leadoff story on the national news consisted of a terse release from the Pentagon stating that the Grand Island evacuation had been completed, the unidentified vehicles had actually landed, there were nine of them, each roughly circular and about the size of a university field house, and that their origin was "undetermined."

That last point was the important one, since it implied that the things definitely weren't ours. Also, if they'd been from another country, the Pentagon would have been most likely either to say so or ignore the whole question of origin. The TV commentators had already begun calling them "alien vessels."

When they showed a fuzzy, long-range shot of the things — a smeared cluster of black streaks against a gray featureless sky — I called Timmy and Sarie away from the dining room table, where they were building something out of the odds and ends of broken toys.

"Have you seen the spaceships that came down?" I asked, pointing to the TV screen. Then on impulse, I asked, "Is that what was coming?"

If I hadn't been feeling so good, and a little groggy, I probably wouldn't have said anything about it, but neither of them seemed disturbed by the question. Sarie stepped closer to the TV set, her forehead wrinkled, a wingless plastic airplane clutched in one fist, and shook her head decisively.

"Those things aren't scary," she said, but she continued to watch the screen intently until the

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newscast had moved on to some other topic. Timmy came to my side and put a hand on my knee, looking earnestly at my face, as if worried about me.

"It's all right," he said cajolingly. "It's all right now."

The President's announcement came about a week and a half later. During that time news coverage of the black vessels settled down to an obligatory 10 or 15 inches on the front page each cycle, but the tone of the stories became as matter-of-fact as with any other subject. Probably the most intriguing report during that time was that officials had made face-to-face contact with the occupants of the vessels. Since this announcement left the question of their origin unanswered, several columnists began to talk seriously of the vessels being extraterrestrial. A Gallup poll showed, in fact, that 43 per cent of all Americans were certain of it, while another 18 per cent believed it very likely. Only three per cent believed it impossible.

So, in spite of the President's opening remarks, the announcement probably wasn't really a surprise for many people, though I myself still felt the thrill of it, of having an exciting thing turn out to be real after all, when you've sort of thought, in the back of your mind, that it would end up in a disappointing mundane explanation.

"What I have to say this evening," the President began, "will no doubt seem incredible or even fantastic to many of you. Let me say at the outset that no fewer than 57 of our nation's finest scientists and scholars, in cooperation with some 20 of their colleagues from other countries, through the auspices of the United Nations, have confirmed the truth of this information. I might add that, having read their very detailed reports on this matter, I myself am convinced of it."

He went on, of course, to say that the Visitors, as they came to be called, were of not only extraterrestrial, but extragalactic origin. Their home world, in fact, revolved about a star which no one had yet been able to locate on any of our star maps — though it was felt that this might be because of differences in optical capabilities, which appeared to render our star maps confusing to them, and theirs to us, so that a one-to-one correspondence had yet to be firmly established.

He gave some additional facts: neither species' bacterial parasites appeared dangerous to the other; the Visitors were capable of the sounds of human speech, and their own several languages could be learned with relative ease by humans; they were social animals, though not gregarious, apparently evolved from predatory mammals

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with high territorial instincts, which had lived in packs; they were bisexual and monogamous; most of them ascribed to one or another of a very large number of religions, all of which postulated some sort of afterlife and stressed care of the young and advancement of the social organism as the highest good; their science of communication was based almost entirely on electronic amplification of extra-sensory powers.

It was this last fact which had opened space to them, though they were no longer-lived than humans and had not found a way to travel faster than light, except in thought. Those on board the nine ships were literally hundreds of generations removed from their home planet — none had ever been there in the flesh — yet they participated in the life of that world, as did similar groups of other far-flung voyages, via telepathic communication that was apparently lagless.

But the most significant part of the President's announcement was the fact that the Visitors' arrival on Earth was not entirely a matter of chance.

"They say," he said, "That they were summoned here, though it is not yet established by whom or for what reason. Their communications equipment, however, recently began intercepting an urgent, though incomprehensible distress call, which appeared to be issuing from this planet. This mysterious signal, which they describe as 'impassioned and inarticulate,' ceased at the moment they entered our atmosphere."

As if anticipating the thought that must have sprung into millions of minds, as it did into mine, he added: "Our visitors were apparently fascinated to learn, in this connection, of the recent unexplained malady which afflicted many of the children of the world, the so-called fear epidemic, which disappeared the same morning their ships landed.

"They believed at first, I am told, that the children of Earth, through some undeveloped and undisciplined telepathic capability, may have sensed the approach of some danger, and that their reaction to this, which is only too vivid in the memories of most of us, was somehow received by our visitors' equipment as a concerted cry for assistance.

"To date, however, they have been unable to ascertain the existence of any approaching danger to this planet which might have caused our children's apprehension.

"No doubt there are some who will call attention to the aliens themselves, as a hypothetical danger to this planet, being unknown and possessing certain technologies

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clearly in excess of our own. The aliens themselves, judging from the reports I have seen, have been frank to note the coincidence — that such a danger should be sensed by the children of Earth just as our visitors were passing near enough to intercept an undirected, unwitting telepathic signal. In fact, our own mathematicians and those of the aliens agree that the probability of such a coincidence being a matter of chance is beyond the limits of credibility. Current research on both sides, therefore, is based on the assumption that, if there is a connection at all, it must be causal rather than accidental — that is, that the nearness of the aliens must somehow have triggered the 'fear epidemic,' which was then picked up as an SOS, so to speak, by the aliens' communications equipment." The President paused, then spoke again in a slightly raised voice.

"Let me assure you that I, as your President, have satisfied myself that there is little likelihood of the aliens posing a threat to the inhabitants of this planet. Intensive studies of their technology and belief systems, among other items of their culture, have convinced our researchers — and myself — that our visitors have neither the psychological inclination nor the technological capability to mount a general offensive campaign against the nations of Earth. While their communications technology is obviously advanced over our own in some ways, the technology they utilize for space flight apparently is not beyond our present capabilities. Most to the point, perhaps, they have no motive, which we can discern, for posing any threat to us. It is true that they have recurrent needs for various raw materials and foodstuffs, but they say, and there is no reason to doubt it, that such items abound on uninhabited worlds. Those who have inspected their ships' stores agree that they have no present needs of that type — indeed, that there is little they could remove from Earth without taxing the capacity of their storerooms.

"Beyond that, however, there is the fact that the aliens probably have more to fear from us, than we from them. Our military experts agree that their weaponry is, if anything, somewhat primitive compared to our own, and that they have no recognizable defense against nuclear force. It would be fair to say, in fact, that while their ships are within our atmosphere — or even somewhat beyond it — they are quite literally at our mercy." He set his notes aside and looked directly into the camera.

"Let me say," he concluded, "that it seems to me a striking sign of their genuine good will that they

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choose to remain on our planet and help us investigate the disturbing mystery surrounding their arrival, in the face of weapons which they clearly — and with some justification — regard as quite horrible, and in the face of a suspicion on our part which they themselves admit is quite reasonable, under the circumstances." He looked down again and cleared his throat.

"I now wish to introduce the captain of the alien fleet, by videotape, for a brief message of greeting. Captain Sor Sorsi."

I blinked and sat up straight, alarmed. This hadn't been announced, and having it sprung this way, I felt as one does when the dentist says, "Why don't we just go ahead and pull it right now?" I hadn't had time to get prepared to be confronted by an alien.

But there it was: an impression of a tall, slender human-looking figure, oddly hard to get hold of visually, because of one's expectations about the human form. It wore a square-shouldered uniform that wouldn't have looked out of place on a 19-th century officer of some obscure European nation. The face, however, struck me at first as vaguely Oriental, with eyes slanted upward from the nose and a tiny perpetual smile.

"Hello, people of Earth, from my people of the fleet Tenni." Its voice was incongruously deep, considering the slender frame. "Thank you for your hospitality. We offer what aid our heads and hands may be able to make for you. We plan no danger for any single member of you, or any grouping, so have no fear, please. We hope to greet many of you singly in times just ahead."

And then it was gone and Timmy was banging on my arm with his fist and shouting, "Foxman, foxman! Daddy! You see the foxman?" He was clearly delighted, and I saw that Sarie, too, was perched on the edge of the sofa, beaming as if enraptured, while on the TV screen a couple of network newsmen struggled to find something to say.

Timmy made me realize abruptly that the alien captain had, in fact, looked slightly vulpine. Its face had been softly triangular, as if covered with down, and I seemed to see, in my mind's afterimage, light tufts of whiskers on either cheek. The eyes, however, had left an impression of warmth and intelligence, like those of a large friendly dog. Somewhere inside me, I understood the children's reaction.

On the late news that night there was a further announcement of a release from the President's council on the alien visitors — the body of scientists and scholars he had mentioned — that a joint research project was underway in

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an attempt to link the "fear epidemic" with the signal received by the Visitors and to establish the cause. The release said the project would be international in scope, including more than 30 nations which had indicated a willingness to cooperate. It added that participation by individuals selected at random might be required, including some young children, but that any such participation would be entirely voluntary, in the United States, at least.

Summer seemed to come quickly after that. The ground dried up and forests of grass came up everywhere and hay fever began to itch its way into the corners of my eyes. Work settled down to a normal summer routine of civic group meetings and 4-H fairs and boating accidents out at the lake. The Visitors became old news, as anything will, and slipped off the front page, except for an occasional feature or some new revelation from the research project — mostly bits of data confirming man's dormant extrasensory powers, including telekinesis, which was unknown to the Visitors. ("Perhaps it comes of having had hands longer," one of them suggested on Face the Nation.) We wasted some time trying to find out if anyone locally was involved in the experiment before discovering, via the national press, that all such participation was being kept confidential to keep media attention from skewing the results. Memories of the "fear epidemic" faded and became enmeshed in everyone's vague unpleasant memories of that gloomy rainy spring.

As so often happens, a thing that once seemed astonishing became only a thing that had happened, history, and therefore unremarkable. Few people probably noticed that the world had changed, really, as few people usually do right away, except with an effort of imagination, or when something spontaneous — a smell of rain in the air or an old song on the radio — might remind them of the time of the landing, amusing them momentarily to think how exciting and bizarre it had all seemed.

Visitors were on TV nearly all the time, on talk shows and news interviews, and it was impossible to be suspicious of them any longer. They were so clearly human that their presence extended the definition of the word. Whatever doubts some of us may have retained that they would somehow turn out to be monsters were dispelled by their obvious affection for the young, an element of their culture which human children universally responded to. Their own children, utterly charming and poised from

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having been reared in the midst of such affection, won friends wherever they appeared, mostly on Saturday morning kiddy shows and at places like Disneyland. Visitor women, who, to human eyes, were indistinguishable from the males, made some appearances on women's programs, but that didn't turn out as well, since there was no division of labor by sexes in the Visitor culture, except for nursing of the very young. It was more than three months after that first videotape appearance when a Visitor on the Johnny Carson show remarked casually that Captain Sorsi had been confined lately because of her pregnancy — causing an astonishment which the Visitors found astonishing in their turn.

Similarly, there seemed to be no period equivalent to adolescence in the lives of the Visitors, and they found human teen-agers a fascinating phenomenon. Aging, on the other hand, was as much a problem for them as for us, and their elderly seemed to take great delight in touring Earth and being the center of attention, particularly for children, who could not resist them. Far from being an alien invasion from the stars, it was more as if a new race had been discovered on some unexplored island of Earth.

It was during this period that Ben Sorter stopped by for a beer late one night (early one morning, actually) after working the night-side cycle on a Saturday, and we talked shop and watched television into the daylight hours.

What we saw was one of those plantmen-from-Mars movies from the '50s, which were enjoying a kind of reverse-nostalgia vogue. It was amusing, of course, in light of recent history, but there was also a kind of relieved feeling one got from watching them, knowing now that the rest of the universe probably wouldn't turn out to be so different or so hostile, after all.

"Still," said Ben during a commercial, "it is very strange if you really think about it. I mean, here we are...sitting in your living room just like always, watching this dumb movie, and at the same time, right now, this instant, there are people in this world who weren't here at all a year ago — who are completely alien in every physical sense. Think of it...they have a whole evolutionary history, so that a snail or a lizard or...hell, this sofa...or a rock...whatever, all those things are our close relatives, compared with the Visitors. That's how different they really are. There's no common point of contact, except now, by accident."

I shrugged and nodded.

"Yeah," I said, "but I sometimes have more that kind of feeling about other humans...like

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all those people in China, for instance, who come from the same planet, the same contiguous piece of matter, but...somehow they're more different than the Visitors, really. I probably know a lot less about their culture and history...."

I crushed a beer can in my fist, tossed it into a wastebasket next to the kitchen door, and then rubbed both hands against the arms of my easy chair, feeling the bristly fabric catch at the tiny ridges of my palm. The front door was standing open and the breeze coming in smelt moist and green and dark, of lawns and trees still flushed with the spring rains. Somewhere blocks away a single car engine grumbled and faded away.

"I don't know whether it's stranger to think that the Visitors have become a part of this reality," I said, waving a hand vaguely over my head, "or to think that all this has become part of some larger universe that our senses can never really touch this way."

Ben was silent for a moment, then said, "Think how lonely we're going to be when they leave. Think how we'll watch the skies after this."

I was covering an airport board meeting when the results were announced. It was to be a world-wide hookup originating at the UN, and there had been leaks that the news would be "disturbing." But, petty bureaucrats being what they are, the members of our local airport board decided to hold their regular monthly meeting anyway; and, newspapers being what they are, we had to cover.

But I was out the terminal door as soon as business had concluded, even before the meeting had actually adjourned, and turned the car radio on to see if there was any postannouncement commentary still on.

"...notified by telephone or in person and invited simply to accept or reject the offer. U.S. officials say that no pressure will be brought to bear on any persons in this country. The Visitors, indeed, have stipulated that they will accept no child whose parents are not sending him voluntarily.

"A late announcement from the minority group within the President's council states that research will continue toward solving the problems itemized in the project's final report, and full cooperation from the world's governments is anticipated, now that the urgency of these problems has been spelled out so clearly.

"Dr. Hyman Greenwald, a biologist from the University of Southern California, and spokesman for the minority group, stressed that the group will not oppose the Visitors' proposed

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rescue program because of the significant danger that the problems may never be solved, even with the best intentions."

A new voice, sounding as if it were coming through a telephone, broke in: "We do not question the severity of the situation, as outlined by our colleagues in the majority, nor do we oppose the program offered by the Visitors, which we regard as generous and touching. We do deny, however, that the available evidence is proof that man is doomed, as a species on this planet."

Back at the newsroom, everyone seemed to be going about business as usual, but there was very little conversation and people only glanced up as I came in, then looked quickly away again. I sat down and typed out the airport board story almost without thinking about it, with only a vague feeling that I needed to get it out of the way, to clear my mind of trivialities, before I could deal with this new thing.

When I finally approached Clark, he silently handed me a folded hunk of wire copy.

There was nothing new. It was all things we had known about for a long time, coming together. The only difference was that we now had a picture of what they added up to — and it was zero. Pollution of various kinds, depletion of resources, the genetic effects of radiation, aimless and unrestricted breeding, the peculiar psychologies of nationalism and racism — these and a dozen other things had been drawn together by the project, with the Visitors' help, and could now be seen as symptoms of a world-wide disease, and the prognosis was terminal.

Not as far off as we'd thought, either — less than 150 years, at the outside — and all the experts agreed how convincing it all was. The only dispute was over the degree of hopelessness. Some thought the end could still be put off an extra century or two, preserving the world like a cryogenic patient, in hopes of some future salvation. My first thought chilled me: What would old age be like for Timmy and Sarie? I was overcome not with fear, but with guilt, and I understood then that that was the reason for the silence all around me.

I read on. The Visitors believed that technology could be developed which would enable humans to make use of instantaneous telepathic communication, as they did, but escape from the planet, in fleets like the Visitors, seemed a wan hope.

For one thing, they had determined — and our scientists concurred — that humans were too gregarious to copy the Visitors' way

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of life without major alterations, either in the types of ships employed, or in humans themselves. Research suggested that humans would not adapt well to being so confined, in such relatively small numbers, on a journey whose destination was problematic at best. Nevertheless, this was viewed as a relatively minor problem, and work was already being planned in that direction. The more serious problem might be that it was no longer technically possible to achieve such a solution.

This was the view advanced by the majority group, and the one which the Visitors themselves characterized as "painfully tragic:" that Earth had passed the point of no return during the decade before the landing of the spaceships. It was no longer possible, the project found, to build the necessary vehicles with the available resources — and to keep humanity viable for the length of time required. The 150-year estimate, in fact, was based on the assumption that no resources would be squandered in an attempt to build spaceships. It was possible, of course, that one or two ships might be able to get away in the allotted time, but human psychology suggested that any such would probably be prevented by the rapid increase in cultural breakdown, as the end neared.

"Our findings suggest that, whatever the attempted solution, there are some very bad times ahead for all of us," the report understated. "It is not considered unlikely that the species will destroy itself in some final, massive act of despair. There is no question of its capability of such an act."

The report also, almost parenthetically, offered an explanation for the "fear epidemic." The Visitors claimed that humans had begun to sense their own doom during the preceding decade, but that this had never become more than what they described as a "murmuring" in the minds of men, expressing itself in feelings of alienation, senseless conflict, a pervasive cynicism, a growing disenchantment with things spiritual.

"All of your own explanations of the fear were correct, after a fashion," the Visitors explained, "because you knew of the reasons for such a fear, though only the children could truly feel it as yet."

The approach of the Visitors had crystalized the vague foreboding into a tangible fear in the minds of those whose extrasensory powers retained the most potential — the young. The telepathic communication equipment had somehow stimulated those latent powers at a time when the main burden they carried was one of

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apprehension about the future. That which awoke the mind's dormant talents, then, became confused with that which provoked the dormant fear, so that the approach of the alien ships seemed to be the onrushing of doom itself. Apparently this confusion evaporated as soon as the Visitors were within natural telepathic range, without electronic aids, and was replaced by a confidence in the good will of the aliens.

The Visitors now hoped to justify that confidence to some slight degree. They had offered to take aboard their ships about 200 human children, to be our survivors, to be cared for by the aliens until some way was found for the species to be once again self-sufficient, whether in space itself or on some new world. They pledged to make every effort to keep alive the memory of Earth, not to submerge the human children in their own culture.

Pentagon officials, who had studied the ships at great length, were quoted as saying that 200 children would be just about the outside limit of what the Visitors could safely add to their own populations.

To lessen the impact on them, it was suggested that the selections not be made randomly, but on the basis of physical and psychological components which might indicate a high degree of adaptability to shipboard life.

The Visitors had at first expressed reluctance, since the availability of necessary records upon which to base such selection would be much greater in the industrial nations than otherwise, giving children from those nations a greater chance of being chosen. The United Nations General Assembly took a note of the need for some speedy, reliable method of selection and voted unanimously to urge the Visitors to proceed. The wording of the resolution made it clear that the offer was regarded, anyway, as merely a generous but ineffectual gesture, in the context of the doom of a planet.

All this had somehow happened while I was at the airport board meeting, listening to bored businessmen haggle about runway lengths and whether or not to post a guard on the private hangars. The General Assembly action had come on the heels of the public announcement of the project's findings and had been announced immediately afterward, making all the same dispatches. There was so much to make fit, so many ways of thinking to change so quickly that I, like everyone around me, was caught up in a kind of private fog, waiting for things to become clear again. I don't remember picking up the kids at Mrs. Appelman's that

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evening, but I do remember that I wasn't really surprised to find two young men in business suits waiting for me in a parked car in front of our house.

There was a brief, awkward encounter on the sidewalk, with Timmy clinging to one of my legs and Sarie pulling at my hands as if trying to tug me away and into the house, out of danger. I hung on long enough to be given a letter of explanation and a stamped post card.

"Don't say yes or no right now," one of the men said. "Think it over, then send in the card or throw it away. If we don't get it in two weeks, we'll take your name off the list."

It was with a little twinge of relief, turning quickly to guilt, that I learned it was Timmy they wanted. Sarie had shared more of my life and seemed more an acquaintance than a responsibility.

Somehow, I knew from the outset that I would agree, though that was a hard decision to confirm. A hundred different doubts fluttered in my mind whenever I thought of actually mailing the card. Suppose it was some vast evil trick, after all? Could we really be sure of the Visitors' motives? Even if we could, would Timmy really be happier somewhere among the stars, in a universe made up mostly of nonhuman things? What about Sarie, who had already known one such loss? Could I ask her to accept another? Out of the billions of Earth, why should it be me to make this new sacrifice? How easy it would have been to say no, to keep the three of us isolated from these larger frightening things, to be together through the bad times, accepting our doom. It would not be difficult for them to find 200 children, whether Timmy was among them or not. How could I, who had always prided myself on my detachment, on not being involved in the things of the world I wrote about, now be asked to serve such an abstraction as the existence of the species?

Yet that was it, in the end. I sat and watched Timmy labor at a coloring book, tongue thrust out the side of his mouth, and ached to think of him gone, as I had not ached since Marian's death, and was reminded, in spite of myself, that it is in the nature of children to go away from us, no matter how we value them as they are at any moment — that their own reality lies away from us, in the future. And Timmy's future and mankind's future had become so clearly the same that even I could recognize it now. It was only that I had to choose sooner than most parents to let his future be different from and better than my own.

Walking to the corner mailbox

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with Timmy by one hand and Sarie by the other the next evening, the filled-out postcard stuck in my shirt pocket, I bolstered my resolve by reflecting that I might inevitably be called on to sacrifice him to someone else's cause, if he were around in the world's dark declining days, when men would find new reasons to kill one another. After I had mailed the card, we walked on to an ice cream parlor at the end of the block and spent a special time together there, the three of us alone in the air-conditioned chill of plastic and glass, watching the evening turn to night outside the tall windows.

Sarie knew that something important had happened, and after Timmy had gone to sleep she crept into bed with me to find out about it.

"Then will mommy come back now?" she asked, trying to make some sense of the world by reversing causality, trying to find some bright side to things.

"No, sweetheart," I said. "It doesn't work that way." And she seemed to accept that, as if she had known that things are never that neat, but had wanted to ask, all the same.

I slept fitfully that night and dreamed of the diggings on Grasshopper Creek, with rain running down into the mud, where bones glistened like milky glass.

"So you think they're a hundred years old?" I asked Hinman again, but the old farmer shook his head and said:

"No, I meant a hundred years to come. These are your bones, Mr. Hebert, and those of your daughter."

And I nodded, not surprised, thinking that I might have known it without being told because of the way they clung together against the rain.

I told Clark about Timmy the next morning, and he said, "Oh, Christ!" and went into the executive editor's office. When he came out half an hour later, he seemed jumpy and light-headed.

"We'd been wondering what to do if one of the 200 showed up around here," he explained. "We never thought it might be someone on the staff. Anyway...we've decided not to print anything at all until...afterward. I think that's what we would have decided in any event." He hesitated, then made an odd little gesture of surrender with his hands. "Tom, if you...I'm not really asking, you understand...I'm just stating that if you should feel like writing something yourself, at any point, we would...we'd feel honored, frankly, to print it." He grinned sadly.

"I can't say right now," I said. "I just don't know."

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"Sure, sure." He seemed glad to have it over with for the time being. "Whatever you decide is fine. And Dawkins told me to give you...I mean, to tell you...not to bother coming in to work until...until you're ready to. Okay?"

I nodded and he turned and went back to the city desk, shaking his head as if he felt he'd handled something very badly.

That night I received a phone call telling me a special plane would pick up Timmy at the airport at a certain time on a certain day. Besides clothing and toys and so on, I was to supply as thorough a family history as possible, plus pictures, to assist Timmy's Visitor guardians in keeping alive his memories of Earth. The departure date was three weeks off.

After that call I felt a powerful urge to back out, a feeling that all this sadness, all these events of aliens and impending doom, must be kept outside my own reality. Why couldn't they all go their own way and leave us alone? But that passed, and I settled down to the problem of how to fill the three weeks.

My first impulse was to set off on a round of visits to relatives and to take Timmy on a whirlwind tour of circuses and amusement parks and so on. But then I realized how inappropriate it would be. Timmy wasn't going to die; he was going to live apart from us. He would have memories of this time, and what I wanted him to remember most vividly was Sarie and myself, not some confusing welter of aunts and uncles, or animals and merry-go-rounds.

So, as it turned out, we spent the time quietly, mostly at home, playing games and talking and reading stories, or walking out together to the city park or the ice cream parlor — things that Timmy never tired of. In the evenings, in lieu of a written family history, which would have wasted too much of the time we had left in the writing, we sat around a tape recorder and talked until one of us fell asleep.

Mostly I told Timmy and Sarie of their grandparents, all that I knew of and could remember, and of their mother and myself, as children and as newlyweds. Later, the tape captured Sarie's dreamlike memories of her mother, and of Timmy as a baby. It was a rambling, uneconomical history, with Timmy's own voice poking in here and there to ask questions or complain of being thirsty or sleepy. It was a history with no easy stopping place, and so we continued it right up to the night before his departure. The last thing on the last tape was Sarie's voice, saying: "Timmy's asleep, daddy. Can I turn it off?"

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The drive to the airport, at last, was rather like one of the little local trips we had been taking during our three-week holiday, except that Timmy's belongings were loaded in the back seat.

He had known he was going on a trip with the "foxmen" since a week before, and he was excited at the prospect, feeling very big and important. I was reminded of Sarie's first few days in kindergarten, her delight at having experiences to tell of that I had not shared, to have been a part of the world outside the family.

"You pay attention to everything, Tim," I said. "We'll want to know all about it later. Okay?"

He nodded, wide-eyed and happy, and Sarie looked at me questioningly. I gave her a little secret smile, as if I were playing a joke on Timmy, and she appeared to understand.

The airport was literally deserted. Police had closed off the streets for a short distance around, and we were waved through the gates beside the terminal and right out onto the runway, where a small military plane waited. On the runway, at the bottom of the ramp, was a Visitor, the first I had ever seen in person. As we drew nearer, I saw it was old, a bit stooped.

I expected Timmy to turn shy at the last moment, but I had forgotten the magnetism of the Visitors. Both he and Sarie ran to the waiting alien as if it were a familiar friend.

"Timmy and Sarie," the Visitor said, reaching a hand to each, and I was startled and moved to hear it speak my daughter's name. I opened the trunk and unloaded the carton of tapes and the recorder, setting them on the runway next to the pile of Timmy's suitcases and boxes.

"Are you a grandpa?" Timmy was asking as I approached the trio by the ramp.

"I used to be somebody's... grandpa," the Visitor said. "I'll pretend to be yours for a while, if you want to."

"Okay."

"Just a moment, now. I want to talk to your daddy. You wait right here. All right?"

Both children obeyed, and the Visitor stepped out to meet me a few feet from them, smiling broadly.

"I really used to be somebody's grandma," she said in a low voice, "but it's all right." Her cheerfulness grated a bit, and so I nodded brusquely and pointed to the tapes.

"That's the history you wanted. I hope that's all right."

"That's excellent, Mr. Hebert," she said, giving my name the correct French pronunciation. I will do all I can to keep these memories sharp in Timmy's mind."

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There didn't seem to be anything to say. So I just put my hands in my pockets, as if it were cold, and stared up at the plane. The Visitor touched my shoulder.

"Please forgive me if my happiness seems out of place," she said. "For those of us who have outlived our own offspring, this is a thing of special joy. But I feel your sorrow as well."

I sighed.

"Thank you," I said. "There don't seem to be any social conventions for this kind of situation." I remembered the last thing I had to do and pulled the three photographs from my coat pocket. "Here are pictures of Sarie and myself, and this one...will take a special effort, I think."

"Yes. His mother."

The Visitor seemed to understand, and so I simply nodded and turned toward the children. This was the part I had given some advance thought to.

"Sarie," I said, "kiss your brother good-bye. It's about time for him to go." When she had done so, I leaned over and lifted him a foot or so off the ground, kissing his forehead, and then set him down beside the Visitor, who took his hand.

"You be good for your new grandpa," I said.

The Visitor scooped him up and carried him to the top of the ramp, where she paused and turned around so Timmy could wave good-bye; then they disappeared inside the plane. Sarie and I got back into the car and sat watching.

After a few minutes a younger Visitor emerged from the plane, loaded the suitcases and tape gear onto a dolly, and trundled that up the ramp, which closed behind him.

More minutes went by and then

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Sarie said, "There he is!" and I saw Timmy grinning happily from a window high up on the plane's side, toward the rear. He waved again and we waved back. As if that were its cue, the plane's engines coughed and roared, and it began moving off down the runway. It disappeared from sight around a curve, then reappeared further away, coming back toward us, gathering speed.

Just at the point where it was nearest us again, its nose lifted and it climbed away from the earth, leveling off high above and to the east, and fading to a dark shape and then a blur and then a dot and then getting lost in the sky. And I remembered what Ben Sorter had said in a different place and time: "Think how lonely we're going to be when they leave. Think how we'll watch the skies after this."

Neither Sarie nor I wept that night, feeling, perhaps, that we'd been through that part of it already and learned how to take our grief in silence. But we didn't sleep, either; we lay awake in the darkness, listening to one another breathe and giving comfort that way.

Sarie fell asleep just before daybreak, and I got up and went outside and looked at the sky for a moment, then sat down on the concrete porch steps and ran my hands through the wet grass alongside me, and then clutched the black cast-iron railing above, letting the cold metal bite into my palm until I was sure the world was nearly as I had remembered it, solid enough to get along in for a while. And then I went back inside and made some coffee and began writing a story for Clark.

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Here's a lovely story about a guy who looks hard at all the strange stuff — UFO's, disappearances, the Bermuda triangle — and finally sees the pattern. He knows the answer to *all* of it, and pretty soon you will too . . .

The Guy Who Knows About the Holes

by C. G. COBB

The guy who knows about the holes is at home, which is where I expect to find him since he ain't got nowhere else to go, on account of he is broke. Big two and a half story brick, with white pillars, one-car garage, on this little short quiet street. Old neighborhood which is going bad. I knock on the door after I find out the doorbell don't work.

"?"

That's what she says, the broad that opens the door. Stands there in about six inches of crack, bracing herself to slam the door shut. Looks at me, lifts her eyebrows and chin instead of just coming right out and asking, "What the hell you want?"

"Henry Pincus here," I say, but it ain't a question. I know he is.

"*No*, he's not *here*." She looks mad. Eyes are snappy. She is about forty, showing it first in the neck, then in the fingers which are curled around the door. Little tiny wrinkles outside the eyes. Being mad don't help her out any, either.

"Come on, lady. I know he lives here."

"Well, he *doesn't* live *here*." She points to the door she is clutching. I just look at her. She is a big woman, dark hair, light eyes, and she is defensive because she ain't got a man of her own and because some guy named Henry Pincus is living in her house, and she is mad because she is horny and feels guilty about it. That is how I peg her, and I am pretty good at pegging people. So I look at her good, up and down, at the robe which is sort of like a kimono that shows off her forearms and the calves of her legs, which ain't bad, but they're forty years old, all right. She gets some color in her face and says, "He lives in back. Downstairs."

"Thanks." But she has already

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closed the door so she can sneak around inside the house and watch me walk around outside. I move around the right of the house where there is a little walk made out of chunks of old sidewalk set into the lawn, and I follow that to the back of the house, where I find an outside stairway leading down to a basement door, and I wonder as I'm going down the steps if the landlady is getting screwed by the guy who knows about the holes.

I got to knock on the door a lot before he opens it. He is red-eyed and needs a haircut, and his nose is starting to break out in capillaries around the edges, but I know already before I see him that he's a boozer. I have found out a little bit about this guy just tracking him down.

"Yeah?"

"You Henry Pincus?"

"Yeah."

"I got money. For you."

"Let's see it."

"Here's some." I show him twenty.

"What for?"

"To get in. You're the guy who knows about the holes."

"Shit." He wants to tell me to get lost, but he takes the twenty. When he turns around and walks inside, I follow him and shut the door.

Henry Pincus lives in one room which used to be a cellar, but the walls got plastered and painted and rugs got laid on the concrete floor, and the place got wired for lights, and a toilet and a sheet-metal shower got installed in this little cubbyhole off to the side. Over on the other side is a fireplace. There is a couch and a coffee table and a rumpled bed, and in one corner is a dresser, and in another corner is a worn-out kitchen table with two chairs, and on one wall there is one of those homemade bookcases out of planks and cinder blocks, and that thing is stuffed with books and magazines and old newspapers. Look, it's a dump, right? There ain't even a place to cook, which makes it look more and more like the landlady is getting herself screwed by the guy who knows about the holes. But then I look and see the door which is the inside entrance to the basement, and then it stops being something to wonder about.

"So what do you want?" asks Pincus. He sits down on the bed and reaches down beside it and opens up this little bar-sized icebox and hauls out a beer. Just one.

"I wanna know about the holes. You're the guy who knows, am I right?"

He stares at me and gets his finger in the ring and says, "Twenty got you in here," and pops the ring on the beer can just like he's pulling the pin on a hand

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grenade. I let him drink while I'm looking around. He comes up for air and says, "I work for money. You can ask for free. You want answers, pay."

"How much this cost you?" I ask him, and I nod at the room.

"Hundred fifty."

"Well," I says, "if she ain't getting screwed, you are."

He says, "Well, as a matter of fact, she is. Seems to make for pieceful coexistence." And he smirks like he just told a joke.

"In that case," I says, "you're *really* getting screwed."

"Speaking figuratively," he says in a serious way, "we are both getting screwed. I'm coming up on two months behind in the rent."

"That ain't bad," I tell him, just to show him I'm on his side.

"You just don't know," he says, and cuts loose with a ragged, painful-sounding burp. "The woman is a man-eater. Insatiable. I earn every penny of what I don't pay her."

"That ain't good," I tell him, to show him I'm in sympathy.

"What are you," he says, "some *meshuggener* social worker? As a conversationalist you'd make a great bouncer."

"Boulbas," I says, and hand him a card.

He reads it. "Private detective." He looks up. "So who hired you?"

"Confidential. I ain't gonna tell you now, anyway. You ain't told me nothing."

"So what do you want to know?"

"About the holes?"

"That'll cost you two months rent to start."

So I hand him three hundred bucks, and he looks startled and sorry at the same time, and I can read his face about how he's gonna make me spread some more grease on him. If he can get paid ahead, maybe the landlady will let him alone. He gets a hound-dog expression and asks me, "How old do I look to you?"

"Don't start feeding me none of this," I tell him. "I paid you. Work."

"I'm thirty-nine years old," he says, ignoring me. "I am a goddamn fool for living in a basement and screwing some woman who's older than I am so that she won't have me thrown out. I should go back."

"I been where you been," I tell him, "and it ain't worth going back to. You got three hundred twenty bucks on your bed, and you are for sure a goddamn fool if you don't tell me about the holes and cut the crap."

So he does. It goes like this:

I've always been a scholar of sorts. A private scholar specializing in investigations. Not like you, not any kind of a private detective,

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I never set people up to cheat on their wives and then bust in to take pictures and make evidence for divorces. My curiosity has always had a taste for the unusual.

When I was young, it was the flying saucers. I was just a kid in 1947, but I was already collecting information. Do you know how many times I read the transcript of Captain Mantle's last words, broadcast from the cockpit of his doomed P-51? Reading those words, I'd known he was doomed. Do you chase the inexplicable in a War Two fighter plane? You do not. You approach it with dignity, with aloof observation. What was needed was a Holmes, not a Steve Canyon. So I observed, and collected my clippings, and searched for a common denominator. And I never, ever, found one. Not until I'd abandoned my search.

You see, I'd gotten tunnel vision. I was concentrating on the UFOs and nothing else. It was only after I'd started noticing the other things, the occurrences without explanations, that the pattern emerged. You want examples?

What started me on the right track happened back in the late fifties, the epidemic of pitted windshields on automobiles. People would go to bed at night, their windshields would be normal. Get up in the morning, windshields shattered as if they'd been blasted with a shotgun. Pitted unbelievably. Happened all over the country. Why? No one seemed to know. So I collected my clippings and looked for a common denominator. Climate? Time of year? Geographical location? Aha! You ever heard of a pitted windshield outside the continental limits? I thought maybe I was on to something, but I couldn't be sure.

Disappearing hoses, next. You surely remember that. Garden hoses, burrowing into the ground before the horrified eyes of their owners, as if gigantic worms were pulling them under, as if they themselves were huge green worms. Another epidemic. Suddenly reports coming in all over the country of people who'd turn on the water and watch their garden hoses burrow into their lawns. There were several people whose hoses were disconnected from the faucets; they never got their hoses back.

All right: two examples, unrelated except for the mystery. Observed effects with no apparent causes. Like the UFOs, science offered explanations, many of which were valid, leaving only a small percentage of truly unexplained phenomena. Did I separate these minorities and investigate? I did. Did I arrive at any other explanation? Certainly not. Not even the common

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denominator I was looking for. I had to step back to find it.

The key word is *epidemic.* Think about it.

Then I break in on him. "I been thinking," I says. "You know what about?"

He looks irritated and finishes his beer.

I says, "I been thinking that this has all been bullshit. You ain't told me nothing. Everybody knows about them hoses."

"Do you know what caused the incidents? You know the *why* of the matter?"

"How come you don't tell me? I paid you, right? You ain't been delivering. Gimme a beer."

He reaches into his little icebox without getting off the bed and hauls out another beer, then hesitates. "One more month." So I give him another hundred-fifty, and he gives me the beer and a sort of amazed look, and then he hauls out another for himself, and after we both pull the pins, he starts again:

Epidemic. There's your pattern for you. In 1947, the first official (you might say) sightings of UFOs in modern times. A highly publicized death, later explained away (in spite of Mantle's observations about the object's speed and direction) as being the result of an experienced fighter pilot mistaking a weather balloon or the planet Venus for a flying object. Immediately, hundreds of sightings, thousands throughout the intervening years, fading away at intervals, flaring up again when a new, spectacular sighting occurs. A large percentage of the sightings being honest mistakes, a similarly large percentage obviously reported by crackpots. The remainder a mystery, perhaps too small a percentage to bother with, because of lack of evidence, faulty memory, and so forth. But what about the original sighting? The one that tees off each new epidemic? Isn't that the one for which no explanation sounds right?

Take the garden hoses, now. A classic —

"Wait a minute," I says. "How about the pitted windshields. Don't miss that one."

He shrugs. "Admittedly a mistake on my part. The pitted windshields could be accounted for by deficiencies in design and production of wraparound window glass. The auto makers returned to a more conventional (and more functional) design and the pitting stopped."

I sip my beer and think about it. "That was it, huh? I'll be goddamn."

But (he says) the garden hoses were another matter. A true, though scaled-down, epidemic of

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the UFO variety, though a reverse opinion would be apparent under cursory examination. Consider that most of the reported incidents could be *demonstrated.* Pictures could be taken (and were) of garden hoses, half in and half out of what looked like gopher holes. Of course, there were the cases of people reporting the complete *disappearance* of their hoses, with only the hole to photograph. One must look objectively upon those cases as offering insufficient evidence. The phenomenon was explained in various ways, some of them quite soundly. Why, then — pay attention, this is important — why, then, did the burrowing hoses cease their burrowing when the fad had passed; when it was no longer fashionable to discuss disappearing hoses?

He slaps the bed. *"There's* some more of the pattern for you!"

"Screw the pattern," I says. "I'm in here, and I'm paying you, and what I got to know is, how come?"

He sips his beer and smacks his lips. His mouth gets a smart-ass little quirk in it. "Witchcraft. Lots of people think it's witchcraft."

"I ain't buying that," I says.

He shrugs. Goes on.

I'm talking about *patterns.* I've spent my entire adult life investigating patterns, establishing (or attempting to establish) common denominators, with only limited success. The field I've chosen is vast, much more so than you believe at just a glance. Take for another example the disappearances.

Each year thousands of people drop out of sight for various reasons: murder, accident, abduction, escape from an unpleasant situation, but the reasons are only *ad finitum* — up to a point. The solid reasons end when the genuine disappearances begin.

Each year, among the thousands of disappearances, there are people who, for want of a better word, *vanish.* They stroll into men's rooms at gas stations and never return to their cars, *and they do not leave the men's rooms.* They go to bed at night and are not there in the morning. They go into a room with only one entrance and don't come out, and the next to enter finds the room empty. Conclusion? Each year, a genuine disappearance precipitates a rash of other, but only apparent, ones. Epidemic.

"Bullshit," I says. "All them people who skip town got their own reasons. They could care less about some bird in the next state who comes up missing. They prolly don't know nothing about him anyway."

"You miss the point. I'm

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proposing a pattern of action followed by mass reaction. Does it really matter if the reaction is unconscious, or even unknowing?"

"You telling me," and I'm asking it slowly, "that something is making people do things that they don't know nothing about?"

"Some people think so."

"Crap. Some people think witchcraft, too." But he's already going on.

Then there are the famous, the legendary disappearances. The ships, you know, found with no trace of passengers and crew, the last entry in the log made that morning, the food still edible, still on the dining tables, all valuables in place, no sign of foul play. And what about the ships that disappear completely? What about the Bermuda Triangle?

"Well?" I ask him. "What *about* 'em?" I am getting hot. He is getting too cute, taking the money and asking questions instead of answering them.

"There is a theory," he says, "that these ships sailed into a place where two parallel universes intersect, that they sailed right out of this world. That could also apply to some people, certain individuals, too, couldn't it?"

"That's what you're saying? That's what you mean by the holes?"

"I considered it," he says. "It's a nice idea, isn't it? It certainly fits the disappearances, and room could even be made for the garden hoses."

I'm leaning toward him by now. "Is that what you say it is? Is that what the holes is all about?"

"I told you I considered it," he says, "but it leaves too much to be desired. The apparent control over human beings, for example; something that a simple shift of natural laws could not account for. There are indications of intelligence being involved."

I lower my head and sort of glower at him from under my eyebrows. I get a mean look on my face, which is mean to start out with, anyway. "I don't like how you're talking in circles."

"I don't like how you're not paying me." He looks nervous about touching me up for more dough, but if it keeps him talking, what's it to me, right? I count off four hundreds and flip them on the bed, and he clears his throat and hands me another beer without being told. He gets another for himself, and off he goes again:

It *is* a nice, convenient theory about the holes in the fabric of our dimensions, but what about the unexplained? There is, after all, *always* something unexplained. Like the people who burn up in a quick, instant flare of superintense heat. No trace of them, and a

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scorched place on the easy chair or bed or whatever, where they'd been. And those stories you read about, of queer, eccentric people, usually old bums on welfare, who die in flop houses with twenty thousand dollars in the mattresses. Those are not disappearances, and they certainly do not precipitate epidemics, but did you know that there are some disappearances in which the subjects leave behind large amounts of money in squalid quarters? Those are not publicized for the simple reason that the rooms are looted by those who are first to discover the disappearances. Very tough to investigate, those cases, but it can be done with diligent follow-up.

But let's get around to what you're here for. The matter of the holes.

Recently a well-circulated news item concerned a man who discovered a deep hole on his property. His dog enlarged it from the circumference of a broom handle to about a foot wide at the entrance, and the man found he did not have a stick long enough to measure its depth. Eventually the hole grew to substantial proportions, and he became alarmed about the hazard it presented him. So he filled it with junk tires — almost two hundred of them, in fact. Later he discovered that the hole had *eaten* the tires, in a manner of speaking, had sucked them down into its maw, if you want to be picturesque. The theory was advanced that the hole was formerly a well that a previous owner had retired and boarded up, but a party of cave explorers descended it anyway for curiosity's sake. They wanted to see what was *down* there, you see, and there you have the key to the reaction the holes produce in human beings. They found that it was simply an abandoned well sunk in unstable ground. End of mystery.

Well, it *should* have been the end of the mystery. Do you know how many other abandoned wells were discovered in this country immediately afterward? Five. None of them received the publicity of the original. *Every one, without exception, developed suddenly and swallowed anything thrown down it.* Another epidemic? Perhaps. If so, a new element has been introduced into the pattern. An element of — how shall I phrase it? — an element of *subtlety.* Proportionally, certainly these incidents of the sudden holes do not constitute an epidemic. But consider the subtlety involved here. These holes are natural. Abandoned wells. Nothing at all like the Bermuda Triangle, which smacks of alienness and terror. Yet they all happened immediately after the original.

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Certain people are deeply affected by them. One hole in particular, located in New England, has been talked about by several of the more imaginative residents as being one of the entrances to the legendary Elf Hill, or Faery of the medieval times. The holes, while being rather prosaic, have seemed to put a queer knock into people's heads.

"I ain't standing for no more of this," I says to him. "The word is out that you are the guy who knows about the holes. Hell, you been saying it yourself. I been spreading you with eight hundred seventy bucks worth of grease, and you ain't told me nothing about the holes I dint already know. Let's knock off this clown shit. Give."

"Oh?" he says, with that wise-ass smirk again. "You don't believe that the holes are caused by elves?"

"Do you?"

"Would you believe that the holes, vanished people, disappearing ships, and burrowing hoses are caused by extraterrestrials who are observing us from flying saucers, and have been since 1947?"

"No. That's a lotta crap."

"How about another race, separate from *Homo sapiens,* coexisting with us here on Earth, unknown to us, with superior intellect and abilities far beyond our own, who experiment secretly upon us and collect occasional specimens for their own use?"

I just stare at him, with what I hope is a disgusted, dirty, mean look.

"No? All right. How about a universe existing in the same space as this one, but just one beat out of phase, and the inhabitants of that universe have discovered a way to bridge the gap, or more accurately, to crawl through the hole, and get us in phase for just long enough to—"

"I'm taking the money back," I am gritting my teeth, now, "unless I get the straight dope. Right? You got the message? Now *give.*"

He leans back. He ain't scared. Hell, he ain't even nervous. It's like he finally got to some goal he's been chasing for a long time. He stares at me a second, then opens his mouth and talks, very dignified.

"I mentioned before that I have spent my adult life collecting information on these phenomena. Do you think, do you really believe, that I have done it for nothing? For a paltry eight hundred dollars? I live in obscurity, but I deserve more for my efforts, much more. The information I possess is worth *millions,* and I say that with full knowledge of the worth of a million dollars. Do you think to buy it from me for a few month's rent on this pigsty?

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"I've given you several possible reasons for the holes, the UFOs, the disappearances, and the rest of it. You scoff, yet one of the reasons is bona fide. I have evidence. It's all there." He waves a hand at the homemade bookcases. "Can you afford it? Have you brought a million dollars with you?"

I just stand there, thinking about what he just said, trying to remember everything he said before.

He says, "I'll give you this much for the eight hundred-odd dollars. Every one of the things I've described to you is the direct result of intelligence — very alien, very calculating, very sophisticated intelligence. Intelligence that is extremely jealous of its own secrecy, that guards it at all costs. Something I didn't mention before: one of those persons who disappeared was one of my correspondents. He was also pursuing the answers to the big mystery. He disappeared without a trace not quite a year ago, after informing me that he had discovered what we were both looking for. Do you understand now why this information that I possess is valued so highly?"

I say, "Witchcraft, elves, space-time warp, extraterrestrials, another race on Earth, parallel universe slightly out of phase. That's what you said, ain't it?"

He nods, solemnly.

"And one of them is the straight stuff?"

He nods again.

"Okay. I think I got enough."

He seems to remember something. "One moment. Who was it who hired you to come to me?"

"Nobody," I say, and reach for him. He screams. I snatch him, and he comes off the bed kicking and screaming, and I stuff him into my belly, which is nice and big. He goes in just fine, except for his foot, which flops out and jerks. He's still screaming in there, I can hear him, as I stuff forty thousand bucks under his mattress, spreading it out good.

I stick my face down into my chest so I can see him, and I say, "Listen. You was wrong. I ain't none of those things you mentioned — as far as I know, anyways — and I don't know nothing about no flying saucers. You only had one thing right. You went far enough to make me come after you. You wanna know what I am, *really?*"

But he just screams and screams, like he don't care about solving the big mystery no more.

"I'm a collector, buddy. I collect crackpots. I got the biggest collection of ding-a-lings in the world."

Just for the hell of it, I stuff another twenty thousand into the little icebox. Then I make all the

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crap on the bookcase go up in smoke. POOF! I always like to do that. I reach down and stuff his dangling foot back into my belly and consider going up the chimney and scaring hell out of the landlady, but I decide to take the usual way. So I just go down the toilet with him, and let me tell you it is damn good to be back in the sewer.

(*from page 72*)

though. As with Carol Burnett's wonderful movie spoofs, it works on a more general level through an intimate knowledge of the originals. It's also a good movie. Where those sequels (with the possible exception of *Bride of...*) were really mostly tedious, badly-written fill, with only five or ten minutes of really good action or effects, this one speeds right along, not stopping for a minute and being absolutely consistent within the framework that's set up.

I seldom mention actors, since I have a general philosophy that performers of all sorts are subject to the material and the best results are from a sort of selfless teamwork. However, so many people are so good in *Young Frankenstein* that they should be mentioned. Gene Wilder (who also wrote the script with Brooks), whose major quality is the officiously inefficient, is perfect as Frankenstein. Madeline Kahn is properly nauseating doing her rapacious - woman - with - whim - of-iron-playing-coy act as the fiancee Elizabeth. Peter Boyle is delightful as the monster, never quite pushing his reactions beyond the characterization.

Cloris Leachman shows an unexpected gift for comedy as the demented housekeeper (unexpected, at least, to non-watchers of The Mary Tyler Moore Show, of which I am one). And Marty Feldman nearly walks off with the whole thing as Igor (pronounced *Eye*-gor and don't you forget it). Dressed to look like the wicked witch in "Snow White" in black hood and cape, he wanders through the whole chaos, his hump changing sides now and then, endearingly mucking up everything he comes in contact with.

So let's have no more Frankensteins for a while. But see this one, by all means. If I laughed, it *must* be funny.

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Letters

Flying Saucers Are *REAL?*

"The Rocketing Dutchman" (F&SF-Feb.) was mislabelled "Science." It should have been labelled "fantasy." A scientific article would have resulted from the gathering, evaluation, and investigation of relevant data. It would not consist of biased pronouncements from on high based upon ignorance about UFO sightings, who sees them, who believes in them. The logic is faulty, the statistics misleading. Dr. Asimov is entitled to his personal opinions about UFOs; but, let's not present them as science.

Since 1970 I have been the only space scientist known to be devoting full time to Ufology. I have lectured to hundreds of college and professional audiences in 44 states ("Flying Saucers *ARE* Real"). Dr. Asimov admits he receives no UFO journals, has read none of the major scientific publications on UFOs, has investigated no sightings and belongs to no UFO organization. Yet he judges the Hill sighting as much more fictional than his stories... without any knowledge.

He implies that UFO enthusiasts are mystic cultists, intellectually feeble, unrespectable. A poll of scientists and engineers showed that a majority believe in UFOs. The 1973 Gallup Poll showed that a majority of Americans believe in UFOs and that the greater the education the more likely to believe.

Dr. Asimov says that the only reason we believers think UFOs are ET spacecraft is that we can't find another explanation. Hogwash! We who have studied the data have deduced this conclusion because the best reports indicate that some UFOs are manufactured objects of definite size and shape behaving in ways that earthlings have so far been unable to duplicate. If they weren't made here they were made on some other planet. It is not true that only a small minority of the sightings are neither mistakes nor hoaxes. In the largest scientific UFO study of the 2199 sightings, 2% were psychological aberrations, less than 5% were hoaxes, but 19.7% had to be listed as UNKNOWNS — completely separate from the 10.9% listed as "Insufficient Information". The better the quality of the sighting the *more* likely to be listed as an UNKNOWN.

In addition to eyewitness testimony (would Dr. Asimov eliminate witness testimony from courts as well as from Ufology?) there are radar reports, animal responses, electromagnetic effects, changes in soil and vegetation produced by UFOs. Comparisons of French sightings independent of US ones reveal identical characteristics.

Asimov's discussion about life in outer space misses the boat entirely. One can guess any average distance between advanced civilizations when one has no data. An average distance certainly can't be assumed (as Dr. Asimov does) to be the distance to the nearest one. The average distance of the ten largest american cities from my house is 1750 miles. The nearest is 20 miles away.

Published studies —— by engineers not sci-fi writers — have shown that trips to nearby stars are feasible with reasonable round trip times, without violating the laws of physics and using fission or fusion propulsion systems on

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both of which I have worked. One need not go faster than the speed of light or violate relativity. At 99.99% c, a trip to earth from the vicinity of Zeta Reticuli (37 light years) would take only 6 months pilot time.

It is totally unreasonable for Dr. Asimov to suggest a Black-white world in which Aliens are either here to have tea with earthlings or would keep hidden. I have elsewhere suggested many reasons for visiting Earth. Is Dr. Asimov so naive as to believe that Aliens wouldn't know that Earth has no leader to be taken to and that every Air Force on Earth would love to grab a flying saucer for its weapons delivery capabilities?

Stanton T. Friedman,
Nuclear Physicist

Dr. Asimov Replies

Mr. Friedman's letter is the typical lucubration of the professional UFOlogist who makes a good living by lecturing to the naive. The worst thing that can happen to him is to have a real spaceship land — for then conventional scientists will take over. I dare say he doesn't worry about that much, however.

—Isaac Asimov

Prince Rupert of the Rhine

If your revived letter column is to be a permanent feature — I hope so — perhaps you would like to print this correction of a statement in Avram Davidson's review of my novel A MIDSUMMER TEMPEST (November 1974).

Of the hero, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Avram writes, "In our universe he died in middle-age of syphilis; ironically his name survives in the Canadian Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land." Now ordinarily I defer to this friend's truly remarkable erudition; but in the present case, he had no particular reason to read practically everything in existence on Rupert's life, which I did.

I think he must have been influenced by Pepys, who in our history worked under Rupert after the Restoration, did not get along with him, and as usual had no hesitation about slandering an enemy in the famous Diary. The facts are, first, that Rupert lived to the age of 63, unusual in his day and still pretty good in ours; second, by all accounts he remained alert and in good health practically until the end, which a seventeenth-century victim of the Great Pox emphatically did not; third, that in spite of fathering an illegitimate child or two, on the whole he was considered unusually chaste, being indeed the kind of mild Calvinist whom I depicted. Besides his importance in the naval development of Restoration England, he was both an artist and a scientist, a founder of the Royal Society, and a sponsor of the explorations which caused Prince Rupert's Land to be named in his honor.

Granting him his human share of failings, he still comes through as one of the more admirable characters in history. I am sure that Avram Davidson will wish as much as I do to see his memory done justice.

— Poul Anderson

Two Views of January

In re the January issue of F&SF:

The "Kilgore Trout" novel was most peculiar. I enjoyed it somewhat, but on reflection I feel that there isn't

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really much there. We have a pseudo-epic in which Simon galivants around the universe, spending 500 years here and 200 years there (in 5 pages) while becoming involved in various (usually protosexual) apparently pointless adventures in a long buildup to the revelation of the answer to a rather cliched "primal question," only to receive the obvious cliched primal answer. No great truths are brought out, no subtle point is established. Someone is making fun of someone. Mr. Vonnegut may have been pleased but I was not.

Zenna Henderson's "People" story, on the other hand, was superb. I have always looked forward to new stories in this series, and have rarely been disappointed. This time, I was downright elated. I find myself with nothing to say beyond "Thank you, Ms. Henderson" and "Thank you, Mr. Ferman."

All of the other stories in the issue were of at least median quality also. The De Camp article fascinated me, even though I have never read any Lovecraft.

Altogether, then, a good issue. Thank you. However, one concrete suggestion for future improvement: to make it somewhat easier for us readers to make known our feelings in a manner more subtle and informative than dropping or renewing our subscriptions allows, I strongly urge you to institute a department like *Analog's* Analytical Laboratory.

—David Dyer-Bennet

F&SF has been very worthwhile reading lately, but the January issue broke a winning streak. "Noomyenoh" was a bore. "Sanity Clause" was silly, and the title was swiped from a Groucho-Chico routine from A NIGHT AT THE OPERA. "Nobody Named Gallix" was insipid. And "Katie-Marie's Trip," like all other stories of Henderson's People, was very much like a Waltons episode with hippies substituted for hillbillies. deCamp's article on Lovecraft was another silly attempt at idolizing a man whom one of his literary agents, one Julius Schwartz, has said was not a good writer really. And even the second half of Kilgore Trout's revamped VENUS ON THE HALF SHELL was unsatisfying; rather like Joe Cool trying to write like Mel Brooks. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd say that the real author of your serialized Trout novel was not Trout himself but an imposter. But of course you did publish that photo of him, and that is how he looked when he was at The Deep South Con. What a shame!

This month's F&SF was saved, however, by "A Gift From the Fakir" and the Russ, Searles, Clarke, and Asimov pieces.

I was somewhat intrigued tho by Russ' reference to "horny, fourteen-year-old male virgins who are dying of loneliness." Does she mean that all 14 year old male virgins are lonely and/or horny? Or that to be 14 years old, male, and still a virgin is unique and somehow perverted? What would she say, I wonder, to an admission by me to being a 23 year old male virgin with dreams of female love, yes, but not desires for premarital sex?

Asimov's discourse on intelligence and IQ's was interesting, but I think he went to extremes. Tests for intelligence that have to do with memory and deduction and observation, not with vocabulary or math or science or Latin, are valid, I think. And if even logic as a determanant of intelligence is the result of cultural prejudices and biases, then

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(Letters, from page 160)

aren't forgetting to call AAA and walking into a closet culturally prejudiced and biased tests of stupidity? It should work both ways.

—Lester Boutillier

A Kick in the Sense of Reality

This letter is about half a year overdue, but in my usual Brownian path through the August issue I managed to miss entirely the novelet by John Varley. This was brought to my attention today when the February issue came (lovely cover, by the way — keep Hardy and get rid of Walotsky) and I happened upon his "Retrogade Summer." After finishing it I couldn't understand how the earlier story mentioned in the intro could have left no traces in my memory, and upon pulling out the issue I made the aforementioned discovery and had the great pleasure of devouring a second Varley. *This* is what science fiction should be: real people in a real world, both different enough from what we're used to to give us a good kick in the sense of reality. Which kick produces the well known sense of wonder, which has been too sparse in recent years...

—Stephen H. Dodson

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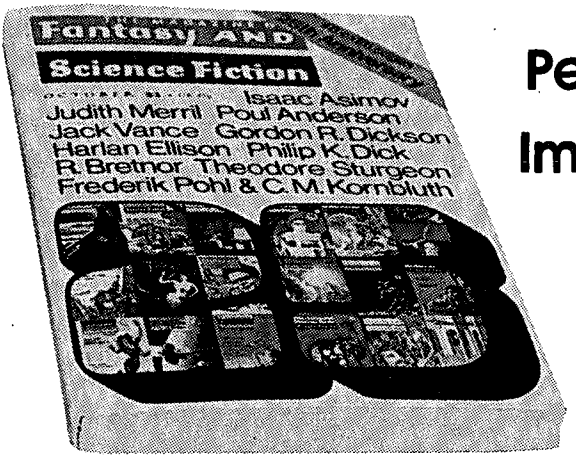

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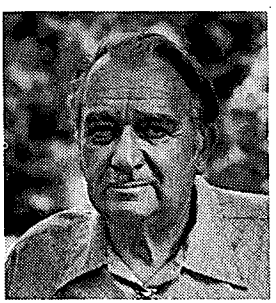

MANLY WADE WELLMAN lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and periodically wanders into the haunted Southern Appalachian mountains, from which come many of his fine fantasy stories for F&SF and others (most recently "The Ghastly Priest Doth Reign," March 1975). A collection of his stories, *Worse Things Waiting,* was recently published by Carcosa, Chapel Hill, N.C.

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